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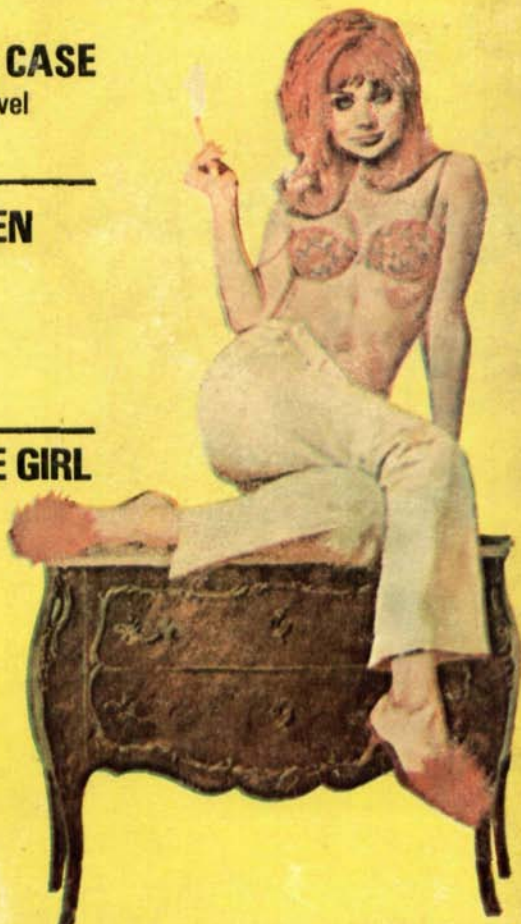
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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1973
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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL THE NOBODY MURDER CASE by BRETT HALLIDAY

In his career Mike Shayne had fought his way in and out of plenty of bullet studded danger. But never like this red death trap—baited cunningly and well for him, with no way back.

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THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



THE NOBODY MURDER CASE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

"The killer is here," the voice said. "You will destroy him with your bare hands. If you lose..." Mike Shayne nodded grimly. He knew only too well what she meant...



"THAT'S THE" trouble with the whole thing," the vice president of the Intercontinent Insurance Company said. "That's the thing that makes me doubt my whole line of thinking in the matter. The man was an absolute nobody."

"I can see your point, Bradley," the big man in the dark suit said as he reached for the brandy bottle on the office desk.

The insurance company executive didn't seem to hear him.

It was almost as if he was talking to some secret doubt within himself.

"Socially the man was nothing at all," Bradley said again. "Achievement-wise he never held anything but pennies-an-hour jobs. He never married. He never really did anything. Financially he was nothing at all."

"I understand," Mike Shayne said. "This guy was a nothing from nowhere." As the big detective spoke he poured a

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double brandy into the tumbler his host had provided.

What Shayne was really thinking was: "If this Willison was really such a cipher, what am I doing here? What did Bradley call me in for?" He didn't say it. He figured Bradley would get to the point in his own way and time. Shayne had handled many cases for Intercontinent before. He knew his man.

"His name was Sam Willison," Bradley said. "Like I said he was a nothing. He took out an insurance policy with us, and named the Friendly Rest Retirement Home as his beneficiary. He was going to move in there on the first of next month he said—only he never got to make the move. Last week he committed suicide."

"Probably got despondent," Mike Shayne commented over his brandy. "Lots of the old ones in this town do. Old and alone and no place to go but somewhere like that Friendly Rest."

"You know the Friendly Rest?" Bradley asked.

"Not any more than I do a dozen of them. I've seen it. A cheap joint as those places go. Takes some county patients, and the county can't or won't pay for real top care. I wouldn't ever want to go there myself."

"I guess Willison didn't

either," the insurance man said. "The question in my mind is why did he think death was better?"

"That isn't what you're calling me in to find out for you," Shayne said. "Your firm doesn't pay my fees just to satisfy your curiosity. Suppose you get to the point."

"All right. The point is I don't think he really did commit suicide. I can't prove it of course or I wouldn't need you at all. I simply feel it in my bones."

"Now we're getting someplace," Shayne said. "Go on."

"There isn't any more. At least nothing I can put my finger on. This guy was a loner. He had his Social Security and a little pension and a room he lived alone in. No relatives, at least none listed on his policy. The policy itself was only for thirty-five hundred dollars. Not enough to make anybody greedy. No enemies we know about."

"Did something about the way he died look wrong?" the redhead asked. "Something that looked like murder? Was that what started you thinking?"

"Not even that." Bradley was out of his seat and pacing back and forth between desk and window. "Cause of death was an overdose of barbiturates. The police found the empty

bottle by his bed. He got them himself at the corner drugstore. No sign of violence. His wallet was under his pillow with thirty bucks still in it."

"Lots of people do it that way," Shayne said. "Pop the pills. Read about it in your daily paper."

"I know. But I had this hunch—"

"Oh, come on," Shayne said and finished his brandy.

"I know. I know. An insurance company doesn't have hunches. It has computers instead. That's why I kept trying to convince myself it wasn't just a hunch. The best I could come up with logically though was; why did he do it? This Willison wasn't sick. We found that out when we insured him. No record as a psycho. No personal problems or enemies. Nothing. That's all he was. A nothing."

"So why does a nothing kill nothing?" Shayne wanted to know. "You might have something there, only I just can't really believe it amounts to much."

"Then I got this in the mail," Bradley said. He tossed a piece of cheap pad paper to Shayne.

Someone had printed on it in crude block letters: YOU FIND OUT WHO KILL SAM WILLISON



II

MAUDIE KUTTNER lived only a couple of blocks from the house where Sam Willison had died. That is, if it could be called living.

Maudie had one room that was eight feet by eight. She had a bed and a cheap dresser and one chair over by the window. The window looked into a walkway between two equally ancient and crumbling rooming houses. There was a torn cotton rug on the board floor and torn curtains at the window. There wasn't even a closet.

Maudie had asthma and a mild-getting-worse case of rheumatoid arthritis and a bad heart.

Right then her mind wasn't on any of these problems.

At the exact moment when Bradley was handing that note to Mike Shayne Maudie was having her last almost conscious thought on this side of the thin

line that separates Miami, Florida, from the world of pure spirit.

There was a pillow over Maudie's face, and someone with big, cruel hands was holding it there and pressing the fragile old woman down on the bed. Her struggles had gotten very feeble as her body starved for air.

Maudie Kuttner gave one final moan and died.

Her killer moved the bed just enough to get at the loose board in the flooring. He pried it up and got out the tin box that held Maudie's pitiful life savings in carefully hoarded bills. It came to just a little over eighteen hundred dollars and a flawed diamond ring that had belonged to the woman's mother.

He took that and left the papers and letters when he put the box back under the board and the bed back over that part of the flooring.

Maudie had cashed her social security check only that morning. The killer took eighty-two dollars out of her shabby purse. He left the rest; it might not look like robbery.

Then he went back over to the bed. He took the pillow off the lined old face and checked to make sure that she was quite dead.

When he was sure that no

spark of life still lingered, he very carefully put the pillow back under her head instead of over it.

He wanted it to look as if Maudie Kuttner had laid herself down to rest and then died of a heart attack or from her asthma or some other natural cause.

When everything was arranged to his satisfaction he went out of the mean little room, closing the door carefully behind him, and down the stairs and out of the building. He met nobody in the halls.

With any luck Maudie Kuttner wouldn't even be found for a couple of days. By that time it would be hard to find out exactly what caused her death.

Likely nobody would really care about that anyway.

III

JUST ABOUT then Mike Shayne was saying to his friend and frequent client Mr. Bradley: "Yeah, I agree with you this piece of paper does change things a bit. What did you find out about it?"

"More nothing at all," Bradley said. "I showed it to Len Sturgis over at Miami Homicide, and he had his lab check it out just in case. No prints on this or the envelope. That's all he'd do right now.

The police are busy with things more important than a crank tip on a case already marked down for suicide. If you turn up anything though, you know you can count on Len Sturgis to help."

"Sure I know," Shayne said. He handed the slip of paper back to the insurance man. "Let me see everything you've got in the file on this Willison. I'll run the ball myself from there on out."

"At your usual per diem and expenses," Bradley said. "After all we don't want to pay out even as little as thirty-five hundred unless we have to."

"And you don't like to waste a hunch," Shayne said as he reached for the thin file on the dead man.

An hour later Shayne had checked in at his Flagler Street office with his secretary, Lucy Hamilton, rifled through the advertisements and bills that made up the morning mail; and walked on over to the downtown section where the late Mr. Willison had spent his last days.

It was an area of rundown rooming houses, barely surviving boom time apartment buildings and a few ancient and decrepit hotels located north of where ground had been cleared for the new downtown division of Dade Junior College.

"If Social Security ever went

out of business," Shayne told himself, "this whole part of town would fall to pieces like the wonderful one hoss shay. These people around here have mostly been dead for years only they don't know it yet. Still that doesn't give anybody the right to hurry this Willison along with it."

Shayne found the address he was looking for without any trouble, and put a big thumb to the doorbell. As he expected, it didn't ring. He pushed the door open and winced at the blast of stale air that escaped from the dark tunnel of hallway inside.

A hand lettered sign on the door to his left said *Manager*; and the big man pounded on the door.

After a while it opened a crack and a dirty old woman in an equally dirty dress and shawl squinted out at him.

"What you want?"

"It's about Mr. Willison," Shayne said. "The guy who died here last week. I want to talk to you about him."

"No," the old woman said with finality. "I awreddy told you cops all I'm gonna say about him. Go away."

"I'm not a cop," Shayne said patiently. "I'm from the insurance company that had the policy on him. All I want to do is ask you a couple of questions."

"Ask somebody else," she said. "I don't know nothing about no insurance company. I don't know nothing about nothing. Go on. Get away from here."

Mike Shayne would like to have pushed on in, but she had only opened the door a couple of inches and he could see that the strong brass chain inside was still fastened. Even if he'd been willing to risk breaking in without a warrant, the racket would have drawn a crowd for sure.

He heard a door carefully opened down the hall, but no one came out. Shayne was sure at least one person must be eavesdropping.

"There's nothing to get upset about," he told the old woman. "Simply a few routine questions that have to be asked."

No answer. She would have shut the door but the private detective blocked that with the toe of one big shoe.

"Of course I know your time is valuable," he said then and pulled a rumpled double saw-buck out of his jacket pocket. He held it up so she could see, but carefully kept it out of her reach.

He saw the old eyes light up with greed, and for a moment thought she was about to talk. Then that emotion was replaced

by another which Shayne was ready to identify as fear.

She shoved the door against his foot.

"I ain't sayin' nothing," she said. "I don't know nothing nohow. What I know I tell the cops already. You go and ask them. Now take that big foot outta my door before I start to scream."

That was that. The big man took out one of his business cards and tossed it through the crack into the room.

"You change your mind, you call me," Shayne said. "Don't forget, I pay for any information I can use."

The detective said the last part loud enough so whoever was listening down the hall could hear it. Then he took his foot out of the manager's door. It was instantly slammed in his face.

Shayne stood quietly for a moment.

As he had hoped, he heard a quick hissing noise from down the hall. When he turned his head a hand was cautiously beckoning from one of the room doors.

Mike Shayne walked quickly back down the hall. The hand grabbed his elbow and almost yanked him through the doorway.

"Come in quick," its owner said as the door shut. "I don't

want anybody to know I'm talking to you."

"Don't worry," Shayne said. "I won't tell anybody."

The man in the room was old and wrinkled. He stood about five-two in his shoes and probably weighed about eighty-five pounds. He wore an old and much mended cardigan sweater which might have been either dark green or brown when it was new, gray and shapeless trousers and a pair of tennis shoes. From the smell he hadn't bathed in a week.

In spite of all that there was something about him which Mike Shayne took an instant liking to.

The eyes in the small, wrinkled face were bright and sparkling with intelligence and humor and the face itself had an almost elfin quality. The man stood straight as a ramrod in his shoes. His movements were quick and alert.

Old as he was, this man had not given in to the endless drag of loneliness and poverty. Here was a vital human being.

"You said you was from the insurance company," the little man said. "Prove it. Show me your identification. You got to have some, don't you?"

"Sure I do," Shayne said. He took a couple of I.D. cards from his wallet and showed them to the little man.

The eyes in the old face grew even brighter.

"Mike Shayne," the man said. His tone changed so that he said it almost reverently. "You the Mike Shayne I read about so many times?"

"I'm that Shayne, I guess," the big detective said. "What do you want with me?"

"First I just want to look at you," the other said. "I hear so much about you sometimes I wonder if you're really so. Now here you stand right in my own room. It's too good to be true, that's what it is."

"What did you want me for?" Shayne asked again.

"I was going to tell you. I read about you all these years. And now—"

"And now what?" Shayne pressed him.

"Now I'm going to help you solve a murder case," the old gnome breathed ecstatically.

IV

MIKE SHAYNE hadn't reached the top of his profession on the Florida Gold Coast by being a fool. The face he turned to the little old man was perfectly serious and even respectful.

"Okay, then. Maybe you can help at that. What makes you think so?"

"I'm a detective myself," the

other said. "Oh, not like you are. I'm a student of detecting; all my life. I have a wonderful library on the subject."

He gestured and Shayne saw that indeed the corners of the room were heaped with old books, most of them paperbacks, and magazines. All of the well known true and fiction detective sheets were represented. There was even a massive hardbound edition of Sherlock Holmes stories.

"I see."

"I read them all. I read all the cases in the papers. I've trained myself to think like a detective. No formal training, you understand, but still I think I'm as good as most detectives today."

The old fellow's eyes sparkled as he spoke and he kept taking little darting steps back and forth across the room.

"Well now," Mike Shayne said seriously, "if that's the case then you know there's a regular routine we have to follow if you're going to help me. There's questions I have to ask you, and—"

"Oh I know," the little fellow said. "Who am I? I'm Tom Rumbo. R-U-M-B-O. I'm a retired letter carrier. What murder? Why the murder of Sam Willison, of course. The murder of my good friend Sam."

He paused to catch his breath and his eyes darted to Mike Shayne's face and caught the expression there.

"Oh, I know that's just the beginning. Give me time. Time. What makes me feel it's murder when the police say it was suicide? That's the next question, isn't it?"

Shayne nodded.

"Well for one thing, Mister Shayne, Sam was my friend. I knew Sam like I know myself. Sam simply wasn't the man to commit suicide. No sir, he was not."

"Somebody else already told me that this morning," the big man said.

"That would be at the insurance company, wouldn't it?" Rumbo nodded an answer to his own question. "You was telling her up front the truth. I thought maybe my letter to them would get action. Yes, but I never hoped it would be the likes of Mike Shayne it would bring."

"So you wrote that note," Shayne said. "Why didn't you sign it? Then I'd have come straight to you."

"You're trying to trip me up," Rumbo said. "Trying to see if I know the detective business, aren't you? It won't work. In the stories nobody ever signs that sort of note. Do they?"

Mike Shayne looked at the pile of dogeared magazines and then he had to laugh. In those stories he didn't suppose such notes ever were signed.

Rumbo laughed with him. "You see? Besides I knew if the man they sent was any good he'd find me. If he was too dumb to find me, I wouldn't want to work with the likes of him anyway. My name's Rumbo. Not Dumbo. You see?"

"Okay, - Rumbo," Shayne said. "You're a detective. So get to it. You know a detective has to have more than a hunch to go by. You can say all you want that your pal Sam wouldn't kill himself, but that doesn't mean somebody else murdered him. He could have taken those pills by accident."

"Sam?" Rumbo said. "Not Sam he couldn't. He wasn't no pill head that doped himself up all the time. Didn't like them things anyway. He bought the one bottle and that only after his nerves got to jumping because he was afraid."

"Now we're hitting pay dirt," Shayne said. "Suppose you tell me what Sam was afraid of."

"Not what. Who."

"Go on. Who?"

"Why, Big Hans, that's who. Ever since he signed up to go into that home he started to get mad at that Big Hans and



became afraid. He said maybe it was a mistake."

"Hans who?"

"I don't know his last name. Big Hans was all Sam ever called him. I never saw him neither."

"Does this Hans own the Friendly Rest Home?" Shayne asked. "Does he work there?"

"I don't even know that for sure. I never seen this guy. Sam didn't really tell me much. Just hints here and there. Nothing definite, but I did get the name. He was afraid of this Hans though. Scared enough so he bought them pills. Scared."

"I believe you. Scared." Shayne said.

"I'm scared too, Mister Shayne. That's one reason I wrote that note and didn't sign it. If this guy killed Sam, he knew I was Sam's best friend. Maybe he thinks I know who he

is. I don't like that. I wanted help."

"Have you reason to think you're in danger?" the detective asked.

The answer came from the front of the building in the form of a crashing explosion that rocked floor and walls and almost jolted the room door out of its frame.

V

MIKE SHAYNE and Tom Rumbo stood frozen in shock for a long moment while the whole building seemed to rock from the force of the blast. A big piece of ancient plaster fell from the ceiling and broke to dust and fragments on one of the piles of old true detective story magazines.

Shayne was the first to recover. He ran for the door. The explosion had jammed the lock and he had to force it open.

Tom Rumbo was right on the big man's heels. When they both got through the door they saw that the whole front of the hall was full of plaster dust and acrid fumes from the explosive charge.

The door to the manager's apartment had been blown to pieces. The door was out in the hall, showing that the blast had gone off inside the apartment.

One glance into the room through the blasted doorway showed Mike Shayne that the old woman who had refused to let him in only a few moments earlier was very dead indeed. The bomb itself must have gone off right in her hands, or perhaps she had been leaning over it on the table. The table top was gone in a mess of splinters and the upper half of the old woman's body could barely be identified as human any longer.

Tom Rumbo crowded up behind Shayne to look into the room. Then he pulled away, stepped back into the hall and stood still. His first turned white and then green and he vomited against the wall.

Mike Shayne came out of the room. He caught the little man by the elbow.

"Come on. We've got to get out of here in a hurry. That bomb will have the police here any minute and I don't want you talking to them right now."

As if to confirm his words they heard the *whoop-whoop* of a prowling car siren coming closer fast.

Some of the other tenants were beginning to come out of their rooms and approach the bomb-wrecked manager's apartment. Mike Shayne ignored them. He held fast to Rumbo's elbow and half propelled, half

supported the little man down the hall to the rear exit.

They got out into an alley and then through to the next street. Tom Rumbo was still pale and shaken but he could walk by himself although obviously looking to the big detective for guidance.

"I'm taking you over to my office," Shayne said. "It's only a few blocks, but we'll have to walk it because I left my car. Do you think you can make it without attracting attention?"

"I think so," Rumbo said. Then his eyes brightened. "That's why we came out the back. Whoever set off that thing might have been watching the front of the house. I never thought of that."

"Come on," Shayne told him. "Time enough to talk when we get there and have a drink to steady us. You drink, don't you?"

"Of course. I never thought about somebody watching. I guess I'm not much of a detective after all."

Ten minutes later they were in Mike Shayne's second floor office looking out over the crowded sidewalks of Miami's famous Flagler Street.

Lucy Hamilton had poured them each a stiff drink from the brandy bottle, and the big man had one of his private brand long black cigars lit and

smoking. He had briefed Lucy Hamilton on what had taken place.

"What do you suppose it means?" she asked.

Tom Rumbo was the first to answer. "I don't know. I was afraid somebody'd try and get me. But old Mrs. Hanger—"

"Maybe they thought Mr. Willison had talked to her too," Lucy Hamilton suggested. "They could have been afraid of what she knew."

"If there hadn't already been two murders, that would make me laugh," Rumbo assured them both. "I mean really laugh. The only time that woman talked to anybody was to ask for the rent money or bawl somebody out for making too much noise. Nobody would confide anything to her. You can believe me when I say that."

"Oh, but surely she couldn't possibly have been that bad," Lucy said.

"I'm inclined to agree with Tom, Angel," Shayne said. "I only saw the late landlady for a couple of minutes but the personality she showed me could have fitted a gila monster. If she was like that with everybody—"

"She was," Rumbo interjected.

"In that case," Shayne finished, "nobody would give

her the time of day let alone tell her their troubles."

"Would the bomber know that?" Lucy Hamilton insisted.

"If he ever met her, he would. Besides I'm not at all sure that blast was meant for her. That's one reason I got Tom here out the back way as fast as I could. I think it was meant for him and she got it by mistake."

Rumbo took a mouthful of brandy and choked and sputtered. "Beer's more my drink," he said in apology.

"Why do you think it was meant for Tom? You must have a reason, Michael," Lucy said.

"I've got a reason all right. I got a good look in at where that thing went off. She'd been sitting at the table and from the debris I think it's a hundred to one she'd been sorting the mail."

"She always did that," Rumbo said. "Every day she took in the mail and sorted it out before putting it by our doors. She was real nosy and wanted to know who got what mail."

"Was she ever nosy enough to open up mail addressed to one of the boarders?"

"I don't know for sure," the little man answered. "That sort of thing ain't easy to prove. But there was times— Yes, a couple of times I could almost swear

letters to me had been tampered with. They could have been steamed open and then sealed up again. Come to think of it, some of the others used to think so too. Nobody could prove it, of course."

"That would explain it," Mike Shayne said. "I think the thing that did her in was one of those letter bombs like they've been using in political assassination attempts lately. They put the explosive in a letter rigged so it won't go off unless the envelope is opened. It looks like a fat letter. Then when the person it's addressed to rips it open—boom. He has it right in his hands and it can't miss killing him."

"Oh my God," Tom Rumbo said.

"Sure," Shayne told them. "You were Sam Willison's best friend. You had it figured they wouldn't take a chance on letting you talk. So they send you one of those death-in-the-mail-box notes."

"Only, luckily, you did not get to open it. That old woman gets the mail first and decides to see who's writing old Tom Rumbo about what. Maybe she was wondering about Willison too. We'll never know for sure now."

"Anyway she decides to take a quick peek into your mail. She'd done the same thing

before and got away with it. What harm would once more do? So she opened it up, or started to. Only this time she found out why it pays to mind your own business."

"I don't like what you said," Tom Rumbo said then. "If that's true, then my life is in danger all the time. That's funny because I really don't know all that much to make me dangerous to them whoever they are."

"They must think you do," Lucy Hamilton said, "and that's just as bad from their viewpoint. Or maybe you know more than you think you do. If that's so it's a good thing for you that you sent that note to the insurance company."

"All I know is that my friend got scared about the time he decided to take out that policy. After that he was scared all the time, and somebody he called Big Hans was mixed up with his being afraid. That's all I know."

"It's enough so somebody delivered a bomb," Mike Shayne said.

"Michael," Lucy Hamilton asked, "why would Mr. Willison make the retirement home the beneficiary of his policy? Isn't that unusual? Doesn't it make them a suspect if he was murdered?"

"That's a lot of questions,

Angel. I asked Bradley at Intercontinent some of them. He says no, it isn't unusual. Lots of the people who go into these homes need a lot of care and they can't pay high rates. The home takes them anyway in return for being made their beneficiary. That way everybody gets a good deal. Besides the amount in itself was pretty small to be a motive for murder. It isn't as if the policy had been for twenty or thirty thousand dollars."

"There's folks in this town would cut your throat for loose change," Tom Rumbo said in an ominous tone.

"I know that. I'm not counting out the thirty-five hundred bucks as a motive. Right now it's the only motive we've got. The next thing I'm going to do is take a look at this Friendly Rest Home. I'm also going to see if I can find this Big Hans guy."

"I'll go with you."

"No you won't," Shayne said. "I want you off the streets and where I can find you. Why give them another free shot at you? You stay right here with Lucy. Don't go out for anything. She'll have food sent in if you get hungry."

"I'm a detective too," Rumbo protested. "I want to do something to help."

"I'm in charge of this case,"

Shayne said. "You can help best by doing as you're told and keeping out of trouble. Later on I may have more for you to do."

The Friendly Rest Retirement Home was in downtown Miami on the Northeast side, a few blocks from where the late Sam Willison had lived.

At some time in the distant past the building had been a tourist hotel, but that time was long gone. The neighborhood was run down now, an area of sleazy shops selling poor quality goods, of rooming houses catering to the social security people, of warehouses and automobile body shops.

The Friendly Rest was a big building that took up almost half of a small city block. The four sides were built up three stories and enclosed a courtyard entered from the street by an archway closed by wrought iron gates. The paint on the gates had given way to rust and the fountain in the center of the court held only a couple of inches of rainwater.

Inside the gates, to the left of anyone entering, was a heavy oaked door with a sign that said: OFFICE.

Mike Shayne pushed the door open and went in to a big room containing three old oak desks and a number of metal filing cabinets. There were

framed photos of boomtime Miami on the walls and what looked like a couple of diplomas, too faded and fly-specked to read.

Only one of the desks was occupied. That was the one with the painted plaque that said: *President*.

The man behind the desk wasn't much bigger than Tom Rumbo but he was certainly at least thirty years younger. He had a thin face and an oval skull already beginning to grow a bald streak back along the crown. His nose and lips were thin and his eyes a pale watery grey-green. He wore expensive slacks and a sport shirt that had to have come from one of the better local department stores.

He looked at Mike Shayne and said: "Good morning."

"I'm interested in your place," Shayne said. "Oh, not for me of course. My wife has an uncle living here in Miami. He isn't really sick or anything, but he is getting pretty old."

"You're thinking of putting him in Friendly Rest? In that case we decide if he's sick." The tone was very businesslike. "All our guests have a thorough physical exam before we accept their applications. We aren't a hospital here, you know."

"I know that," Shayne said. "Do you give the exam yourself?"

"No, I'm an administrator, not a doctor, Mister—uh, you didn't give your name?"

"It's Kelly," Shayne said. "From Chicago. Would you mind if I looked around a bit before I decided anything?"

"Not at all, Mr. Kelly. It's what we'd want you to do. I'll have someone take you through." He pressed a call buzzer on his desk. "My name is Amor, Mr. Kelly. Paul Amor. I'm president and resident administrator at Friendly Rest. The guests call me doctor, but it's only a courtesy title."

"I understand," Shayne said with a smile. "Doctor Amor it is to me too then. And thanks for letting me look around."

He heard the office door open behind him.

"Ah there you are, Nurse Hadley," Dr. Amor said. "This is Mr. Kelly. His wife has an uncle—I'd appreciate your giving him the tour."

Mike Shayne turned to face the woman in the starched white nurse's uniform who stood in the doorway. Long years in the business of private detective, a business in which the unusual and the shocking became routine, enabled him to keep a total poker face. It wasn't easy though.

'Nurse Hadley' had the uniform and the air and even a clinical thermometer in her

dress pocket and a starched white cap. But she was no more a nurse than Shayne was premier of Bulgaria.

VI

MIKE SHAYNE could not be mistaken. There were the same handsome features, so oddly at variance with the cold grey eyes, the sensuous lips and the high breasted, wide hipped figure exactly as he remembered them from years back. So was the way of standing with her left side a bit advanced and the left hand set squarely against the hip. He knew her all right.

Nurse Hadley was Millie Love, just as all Miami after dark had known her twenty years before. Then she had owned, or at least fronted, one of the lavish and expensive gambling dens and houses of assignation that had studded the Florida Gold Coast in the wild and brazen postwar days.

There had been a scandal and a dead man on the floor, a man of such political and financial prominence that a public trial would have embarrassed or destroyed half of Miami. Instead of a trial there had been an elaborate cover up. In the end the man was buried quietly and Millie vanished from the scene. Mike Shayne

had never really known the whole of that story.

Now here she was again in the office of this third rate hostel for the aged and the infirm. She wore her years well, but there was no mistaking her.

She knew him too. He had no doubt of that, and braced himself for what might occur when his Mr. Kelly was unmasked.

The woman looked him right in the face with masked and bitter eyes.

"Why of course, Dr. Amor," she said in a voice that Shayne remembered well. It was the same voice she had used when she took over as dealer at one of her house's gambling tables. "I'll be glad to show Mr. Kelly through. If you'll just follow me, sir."

Shayne followed her out into the hall. He didn't dare turn to face Paul Amor on the way for fear his eyes might give him away. When the office door had closed he looked at her again.

To his very great surprise she still gave no sign of recognition, but met his glance apparently openly and unconcerned. Her still beautiful mouth curved in the smile of a business woman eager to make a good impression on a possible client.

"I suppose you'll want to see some of the guest rooms as well

as the clinic and recreation rooms?" she said. "We'll do those first, then anything else you'd like to see, Mr. Kelly. We want the relatives of our guests to be perfectly satisfied as to their comfort here with us."

Shayne wanted to say: "Oh come off it, Millie. I know you and you know me and we both know it. I didn't come here looking for you either so relax. I never was your enemy."

He didn't though. Her air was so natural and her composure so perfect that he was almost ready to doubt his own senses.

So all he said was: "Yes. After that I'd like to take a look at the kitchens and the staff area. That sort of thing is important in the care a man gets here."

Shayne made no attempt to disguise his voice or natural intonations. In fact he emphasized both. If there had been any possible chance that Millie hadn't recognized him, he wanted to dispel it.

She gave no sign of recognition.

Instead she gave him the complete tour, even looking in on two or three of the guests in their rooms. These last seemed comfortable and at ease. They greeted Nurse Hadley cheerfully.

She even took him up on the

flat roof of the east wing of the building. There was wooden flooring here and deck chairs, even a ping-pong table. The improvised sundeck had several large plants set over by the parapet in heavy earthenware pots.

They were alone up there and no one could have overheard anything they said, but the woman still kept her mask unbroken. Mike Shayne let it go at that. He was sure that he couldn't have been mistaken about her identity, but if she wanted to play games that was quite okay.

When they got down to the kitchens the help, nurses, orderlies and kitchen workers were eating their lunch. Most of them seemed to be either blacks or Cubans. None had any look of a German.

Shayne risked a question. "Do you have a man named Hans something or other working here? Big fellow. A German or a Dane I think?"

"No. Nobody by that name or anything like it. Why do you ask?"

"I'm sorry," Shayne said. "From something someone said I had thought you did."

He had watched her very carefully as he spoke and he could have sworn that she showed no sign of recognition or of any special emotion at the



name, but then she hadn't shown any sign of recognizing Mike Shayne either.

Millie Love had always been famous for her iron hard gambler's mask. By now Shayne was ready to award her an all-time grand master's gold medal for achievement at the art.

She took him back to the office and left him with Dr. Amor. Certainly Shayne could see no sign of any signal passing between them.

Shayne broke away as soon as he could. He let Paul Amor give him a brochure and a blank application form for registry at the Friendly Rest.

He liked what he'd seen, he said, but of course his wife had to be consulted. She'd probably want to come herself, and bring her uncle for a look around. They wouldn't want to put the old man anywhere against his own will. The redhead hoped he'd understand.

Paul Amor said that he understood perfectly. Naturally they wouldn't want to leap into anything as important as the decision they were, he hoped, about to make.

He offered Shayne a drink, which the big man refused, and they shook hands very amicably.

There was no sign of Millie Love either in the courtyard or the entryway as Mike Shayne left the building. He hadn't really expected that there would be.

Outside on the street he turned East towards the Bay and swung to the right around the corner to walk to where his car was parked.

There was a wild yell of: "Look out!" and a hurtling figure slammed into Shayne and drove him out off the sidewalk into the street.

At the same instant one of the big-potted plants from the roof garden of the Friendly Rest crashed onto the sidewalk where Shayne had been seconds before.

VII

IF HE HADN'T been pushed out of the way of the falling missile, Mike Shayne would have been dead or seriously injured. He looked at the person who had saved his life, and wasn't particularly surprised to find that it was Tom Rumbo. He'd recognized that eldritch yell.

"I know," the little man said, looking up at him. "You said to wait in your office. But I'm a detective. You said I could help you with this case. I can't help by sitting there with my feet up, so I followed you."

"How did you get out past Lucy?"

"She was busy mopping up the vase of flowers that fell off her desk and smashed on the floor."

Rumbo said that with a perfectly straight face, and Shayne refrained from asking how the vase had come to fall off the desk. He and Rumbo were beginning to understand one another, and he couldn't help liking the little old man.

"Aren't you going to call the cops or go back in there yourself?" Rumbo asked. "Somebody in there tried to kill you."

"They'd only swear it was an accident."

"But I saw that thing lifted

onto the parapet and then shoved over. I could swear that—"

"You could swear till you were blue in the face and it'd be your word against theirs. It was an accident. You didn't happen to see who did it?" the big detective asked.

"No face," Rumbo said regretfully. "Just the hands and forearms. I couldn't even tell if it was a man or a woman. It all happened so fast, and I had you to look after."

"So you did," Shayne said. "I won't forget it either, Rumbo. Believe me."

"It was nothing," Rumbo said. "Say, what did you find in there? Was Big Hans in that place? I'm sure he's part of the gang."

"No Big Hans." Shayne shook his head. "I did meet an old friend though and I'm beginning to think maybe there could be a Friendly Rest gang. At least I'm a lot more sure than I was before somebody tried to flatten me."

"Just think of it," the little man said. "Inside of one hour somebody tries to kill both of us. Me and the famous Mike Shayne. I never thought to live so long."

"It's not funny, Rumbo," Mike Shayne said.

At that moment Nurse Hadley was standing, with left

hand on her hip, in front of Dr. Amor's big desk.

"It's serious, Paul," she was saying. "That big guy I showed around isn't named Kelly and he hasn't any wife's uncle to put in here. That was the private dick, Mike Shayne. You've heard of him."

The doctor's expression showed that he thought it was serious too.

"I've heard of him. What in the devil was he looking for?"

"I'm not sure. By the way, one of those big plants fell off the roof as the shamus was walking along."

Dr. Amor's face brightened. He said: "How terrible! I hope the poor man wasn't injured badly."

"He wasn't injured at all, Paul. It missed him."

"Oh, a regrettable accident. I'll send one of the orderlies out to clean up the mess before some cop notices it and asks questions."

"Paul," she said. "Shayne asked me if we had a German or Danish man working here named Hans. A big man."

"Well we don't," Amor said. "If that's who he's looking for maybe we don't have anything to worry about after all."

"A big man," Nurse Hadley said. "Big Hans. Paul, you don't think he could have meant Julio, do you?"

"SINCE YOU'RE here anyway," Mike Shayne said to Tom Rumbo, "I guess you might as well trail along."

"Where are we going now?"

"I want to stop by and see an old friend at Police Headquarters. You don't mind do you?"

"Mind? Why should I mind? I always wanted to see the inside of a first rate police station. The labs and the morgue and stuff like that. A detective had oughtta know."

"I'll see you get the grand tour later," Shayne said. "Right now I want to talk to an old friend."

Fifteen minutes later they were seated in the office of Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry, and he was listening carefully to everything that the two of them had to tell him.

"As usual I think you've got something there," the Chief told Shayne when the big man ended his story. "You're right about it being a letter bomb at the rooming house. I got the homicide report a few minutes ago. A bomb like that self-destructs very effectively. No trace of who sent it."

"Of course" Tom Rumbo said and looked important.

"As for you," the Chief said to the little man. "We've got you to thank for saving Mike. I don't think even his head is

hard enough to take a tree and a planter without caving in. What's more I don't know whether a judge or jury would take your word, but I believe you saw somebody deliberately try to drop it on him. Our boys will have to keep a closer eye on that Friendly Rest place in the future."

"What do you mean a closer eye?" Shayne asked. "Have you had the place under observation?"

"Not exactly that, Mike. As a matter of fact we've never really had a serious complaint on the Friendly Rest. Always passes its fire and health inspections—not too good, of course, but as good as most of those places. Never any dope there that we know of. It's just that some of those homes we like to keep an eye on."

"You must have some reason, Will."

"Oh we do—but it isn't always something you could tell the grand jury, or Tim Rourke, or even your own wife. More like a hunch. In this case there's too many funerals."

"Funerals!" Tom Rumbo said. "Dead people. Do you think it's murders, Chief?"

"If I did, Mr. Rumbo, we'd have raided the place long ago. All the deceased have regular death certificates that name a natural cause of death. Not all

by the same doctor either, Mike, in case you were going to ask. The families don't squawk, where there are families. Mostly there aren't. The folks who pick a spot like the Friendly Rest to wait to die in our town don't run to loving families. Mostly they're nobodies."

"Like the late Sam Willison," Shayne said.

"Sam was no nobody," Rumbo protested. "He was my friend. He was a good guy."

"Sure he was," Chief Gentry agreed, "but we both know what Mike means. In this town being a good guy doesn't make you somebody."

"It had ought to."

"Are there any warrants still out on Millie Love?" Mike Shayne asked and changed the subject. "She must have recognized me even though she never let on. She just had to know me, Will."

"No warrants," Chief Gentry said firmly. "Matter of fact I never even heard you mention that name. That dame knows where too many bodies are buried, and not the kind that get funerals either. If it was her you saw, she's real smart not to admit who she is."

"Her type might use a place like that for a cover for all sorts of shenanigans," Shayne added.

"She might, but if you think so you better have plenty of

proof. That's such a hot potato nobody will want to touch it with a ten-foot pole unless you got ironclad hanging evidence. Don't ever make any mistake about that, boy. I wouldn't touch Millie Love for anything less."

"I guess that woman must be what you all would call a somebody in this town then." That wasn't a question. It was a statement from Tom Rumbo.

Both of the big men looked at the little old man and tried to decide whether or not they were angry.

The phone rang then and broke the tension. Chief Will Gentry picked it up, spoke briefly, and then put the instrument back in its cradle.

"That was the rundown I had the boys do on this Big Hans you were talking about," he said to the other two. "None of the boys ever heard of him. Neither did our computer. They're doing a long distance double check on the F.B.I. files, but if he's ever been in our town he must be whiter than a field of lillies, or we'd have something on file."

"I guess so," Shayne said. He turned to the little man. "Are you sure that's the name Willison used before he died? I mean absolutely sure and not just you think or you guess or something like that?"

"Sure I'm sure," Rumbo protested. "I told you I been practicing to be a detective. Detectives don't guess."

Gentry snorted with sardonic laughter. "I wish none of mine did."

His evident amusement put Tom Rumbo more at ease.

"I'm absolutely sure about that," he said, "because I'd never heard Sam afraid of anybody or anything before. He said he was afraid of Big Hans. Big Hans might be after him. He said Big Hans made him nervous, but he wouldn't ever explain. When I tried to ask, he'd clam up tight."

"He sounds like he'd thought there was a Big Hans," Will Gentry said.

"Okay then. If there's such a guy anywhere in this town, I guess I better find him." Shayne got to his feet and reached for his hat. "Come on, Tom. I'm going to take you back to my office and handcuff you to the desk or Lucy, for safekeeping. Then I'm going out and turn over rocks till I find this Hans. I want a talk with him for sure."

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE took Tom Rumbo back to the Flagler Street office by the direct route, making certain that the

little man had no chance at all to give him the slip.

Rumbo didn't like it. "I'm a detective too," he protested. "Didn't I push you out of the way of that potted plant? Mr. Shayne, I hate to put it this way, but you owe me a chance to be in on the whole of this case. You really do, you know."

Shayne wouldn't give an inch. "I hate to put it this way too, Tom, but what I really owe you is protection. I owe it to you to see that you're safe."

"I couldn't be safer than with you."

"Sure you could. You will be safe with Lucy. I may have to go into some pretty tough places, and you may be a detective—I don't say you aren't—but you're no professional fighter."

Tom Rumbo gave that some serious thought. "I guess you could be right about that last," he said finally.

After that he was silent until they had parked the car and were walking the last block to the office. "Mr. Shayne—" he said then.

"Yes."

"There's just one more thing. Maybe I should have told you and Chief Gentry, but you know how it is with us detectives. We like an ace in the sleeve—I mean in the hole.

Anyway I thought I'd tell you later, and I am telling you now."

He paused.

"Go on," Mike Shayne said.

"What is it, Tom?"

"Well, I don't know. Maybe it wasn't important. Just something I remembered Sam said once."

"You let me judge whether it's important or not," Shayne said. "Tell me what it was."

"Only something Sam said. Once when he was talking about being scared he said: 'Maybe I could handle Big Hans if I could speak Spanish.' What do you think he meant by that?"

"The only thing that comes to mind right off is that maybe Big Hans spoke Spanish. Only Hans isn't a Spanish name. It's German or Scandinavian. I don't know—"

"It could be important though?" Rumbo asked.

"It could be. We'll know later. Thanks for telling me."

By then they were on the stairs leading up to Mike Shayne's second floor office.

Inside the office Lucy Hamilton greeted them warmly.

"I'm sorry Michael," she said, indicating Rumbo. "I wasn't looking for him to go anywhere. He slipped out on me. Anyway you found him."

"He found me," Shayne said



and told her how the little man had probably saved his life.

"We both owe you for that then, Mr. Rumbo," Lucy Hamilton said. "Oh, Michael, there was a phone message for you about twenty minutes ago. I think it's important. The caller said if you want to find Big Hans he can take you to him. He said to meet him at eight o'clock tonight and left directions where."

"Yes," Shayne said. "That is important. Who was it called?"

"I don't know. He didn't leave any name. The voice sounded muffled or disguised or something. As a matter of fact I'm not even sure whether it was a man or a woman. Anyway I made him repeat the time and place so I could write them down."

She handed Shayne a slip of paper off her notepad. He put it in his jacket pocket.

"I'll make the meet any-

way," he told them both. "While I'm waiting for the time we can take it easy and then get something to eat."

He was as good as his word. During the rest of the afternoon Shayne made phone calls to some of his contacts, both official and unofficial, to try and find out more about the Friendly Rest Retirement Home. He learned nothing that really pointed to a solution of the case he was working on.

The Home had been in operation at the same address for more than twenty years, in which time it had had at least three sets of owners. Amor had bought in about five years back. He was an out-of-town investor from Chicago and not too well known locally. Nobody Shayne talked to even hinted at a knowledge that Nurse Hadley was anything other than that.

There were no scandals connected with the Friendly Rest. As a matter of fact it had apparently a good reputation for a place of the sort.

Shayne called Will Gentry again, but the Chief couldn't give him much more than he already had. Yes, it did seem that there had been a lot of funerals from Friendly Rest, but wasn't it a place where people went to die. Most of the guests expected to leave in a hearse and not a limousine. No

there wasn't any evidence of murder. No knifings or poisonings. Various doctors signed the death certificates. Amor never did so.

Some of the guests who died there had carried insurance policies naming the Home as beneficiary. That wasn't unusual either. It was one way a person on a small pension could make delayed payment for care he otherwise couldn't have afforded. In itself it wasn't illegal and none of the bequests on record were in suspiciously large amounts.

All in all it wasn't much to go on.

Late in the afternoon Shayne gave up calling and took Lucy Hamilton and Tom Rumbo out to dinner at one of his favorite downtown steak houses.

It was obvious Tom Rumbo hadn't had a meal like that in a place like that for a good many years. He over-ate shamelessly.

After dinner Shayne took Lucy home and Rumbo back to his office and started out to make the meet with his mysterious phone caller of that afternoon.

The place appointed by the caller was on the near North-East side in one of the buildings of the old Florida East Coast Railway freight and loading yards. The yards hadn't been

used since the big strike of the nineteen sixties. New facilities had since been set up in the Hialeah area to take their place. The old buildings had been neglected and were in very poor condition, most of them about to fall down.

Mike Shayne parked his car on Thirty-Sixth Street and walked into the abandoned yards past what was left of the old roundhouse.

Once away from the street there was no direct lighting, but enough reflected light from the streets and buildings of the metropolitan area to let the big man see where he was going. He continued on past office and repair shops in all stages of decay until he found the building to which he'd been directed.

Once it had been an office, but window glass had been broken and boarded over and there was even a sizeable hole in the sagging roof. The front door had once been boarded up too, but someone had recently broken it open. It hung, gaping wide, supported only by the top hinge. Inside was blackness like that of a cave.

Shayne circled the exterior of the building. As far as he could see all other openings were securely boarded. No one could get in or out except by the front door.

Mike Shayne listened carefully outside the front door of the ruined building. Back here the traffic noises of the great city were muted. He figured he could have heard even a mouse moving inside. There was no sound at all.

The big detective loosened his gun in its belt holster back of his right hip and stepped into the darkness. He couldn't see or hear anything at all.

After a moment he took out the pocket-sized, pencil type flashlight he always carried and flicked on the beam. Right in front of him on the floor where he would have fallen over it in another step was a body.

It was a very dead body indeed.

IX

MIKE SHAYNE swung his flashlight beam swiftly around the rest of the room. He and the body were quite alone there.

Shayne put the light back on the corpse.

The man was lying on his face. He was a small man of slender build and he looked as if he had been either struck by a speeding car or beaten unmercifully by several savage and powerful assailants.

His clothing was soaked with blood and both arms and one

leg were so twisted that they must have been broken. The neck was bruised and pulled out of shape. Whoever he was, the man had been strangled in such a way that his neck was broken and the head almost torn off his shoulders.

Shayne scanned the figure thoroughly with the aid of his little pocket flash before touching it at all. The figure lay as if it had been carried in and slammed down on the floor, either that or killed right there in the room with very little struggle on its own part involved. There was no trail of blood from the door, and though the clothing was soaked, most of that blood was already dried or close to it.

The body had been beaten terribly. Only a few of the blows Shayne could see evidence of would have killed the man by themselves.

He leaned down and turned the head so that he could see the features.

The dead man was Paul Amor!

Mike Shayne switched his flash off then. He'd seen all that he needed to at the moment. Let the police and the coroner's men check the body and go over the room for prints or other clues later on.

The body definitely tied in the Friendly Rest Retirement

Home with the death of Sam Willison. Whether Paul Amor or someone else had called to bring him to this grisly rendezvous wasn't so important any more. From now on every one at the Friendly Rest was suspect.

Shayne decided to get out of the old railroad shack.

He started out the door with a swift, silent stride, but the big private detective never made it. As he cleared the door, he fell forward onto the hard ground with force enough to knock the wind out of him. For the moment Mike Shayne was very much hors de combat, out of the picture when he needed his wits and his strength the most.

Shayne didn't know it then, but he'd fallen for one of the oldest and most effective of a man hunter's booby traps. Earlier in the night somebody had nailed or tied a length of rope to the building about a foot off the ground, and left it lying there limply, stretching to the corner of the shack. In the dark the redhead hadn't noticed it.

After he had gone into the shack his ambusher had come out of hiding and pulled the rope tight and held it. When Shayne came out again he tripped and went down.

It was that simple.

Mike Shayne lay there and

fought to pull breath back into his tortured lungs.

He heard a step on the hard ground over by the corner of the little building, but there was nothing he could do about it. He tried to brace himself against a blow or a bullet tearing into his flesh, but neither came.

The voice behind him said: "You lay there real quiet like, Shayne. I got a gun at your back, but I won't fire it unless you make me. I want to talk instead of kill you. I mean it. I want to talk, but if you try anything, I'll have to shoot you."

Mike Shayne knew that voice even as he berated himself for having fallen for one of the oldest tricks in a deadly game. What an idiot he'd been! But the sight of that awful corpse had shocked him out of his usual caution.

He fought for breath and finally managed to talk, still lying face down in the dirt and cinders of long gone freights.

"Okay, Millie. We'll talk. What did you kill him for? Wasn't he your partner?"

"I didn't kill him," Millie Love said. "You can get up now, Mike. But take your gun out real careful like with two fingers and leave it on the ground. Then move over and sit

with your back against this shack."

Mike Shayne did as he was told.

Millie didn't look at all like Nurse Hadley at the moment. She had on a dark knit sweater that hugged her still beautiful figure, loose dark slacks and a denim jacket with big side pockets to hold things like a gun and a length of cord. Instead of the starched nurses' cap, she had a brightly printed scarf tied around her head.

The gun in her hand was a police positive thirty-eight with a two inch barrel and she held it like a pro: The way she held the gun said she could shoot, and the look in those steely eyes even in the half dark of the old railroad yard said that she would.

They looked at each other for a long moment, two pros taking each other's measure.

Mike Shayne was the first to speak. "Okay, Millie. It's your gun and your dime. Suppose you tell me what you want me for. I'm listening."

Her thin lips flicked in a half smile. "Sure you are, Mike. Men listen good when they're under the gun. First of all, I didn't kill Paul. He was my partner. At least he was up to a point. Right now I'd rather have him alive than the way he is, particularly since you won't be

the only one to jump to the idea it was me did him in."

"I didn't think you did it yourself, Millie," Shayne said. "You'd use that gun or a knife. Maybe even judo. That body in there looks like it was run over by a mad grizzly bear. You might have somebody do it that way, but not yourself."

"Now you're showing some sense," she said. "Only I didn't have it done either. If the man that did could come up with me, he'd give me some more of them same. Paul was afraid of him, so he wanted to make a deal with you. He was scared enough to talk."

"Why didn't he come on down to my office?" Shayne asked her. "We could have sat down with a drink and he could talk all he wanted. Instead he has to set up a meet in a place like this. That was almost asking for what he got."

"He was a fool," she said with venom in her voice. "A coward and a fool. He should have trusted me, and he'd be alive right now. He didn't tell me he was going to call you, but the fool used his office phone. Anybody can overhear that. I did and so did his killer. I didn't know that for sure, but I was afraid of it. I followed Paul out here to listen and take care of you if he spilled too much."

"By the time you got here he was dead," Shayne suggested.

"That's right," Millie Love said. "Paul was dead, like you found him. I didn't figure you did it. I was scared cold. I decided to wait and see if you showed up and make a deal."

"You picked one hell of a way to attract my attention," the big man said. He could see holes in her story, but he wanted her to feel free to go on talking.

"It's your reputation, Mike," she explained. "You're a dangerous man. I wanted to set up this little chat my way."

"I don't suppose that includes telling me the name of the killer?" Shayne said. "I don't suppose you'd go that far to make an old friend happy?"

"Sure it does," she said, and then had to laugh at the astonishment that showed on his face in spite of himself. "I'm going to do more than that, Mike. I'm going to give you the killer. Hand him to you all wrapped up like a present where you can turn him in to the cops."

"All right. Who is he?"

"He works at the Friendly Rest," Millie said. "At least you might say he did work there till he took it into his head to kill his boss. You didn't see him when you were there today

because he wasn't in. He was the head orderly. A big guy. A real big guy who liked to kill people."

"For you and the doc?"

"Don't be a fool, Mike. Of course not. We didn't have to kill people. In our business we let them pay us while we waited for them to die of natural causes. Oh, I won't say Paul was above talking them into taking out an insurance policy in his name or the Home's. He might have done that once in a while when he knew the old shmoe was going to die pretty soon anyhow, but what's wrong with that? I don't even think it's illegal and it sure ain't murder."

"What's this guy's name?"

"I'm coming to that. He killed old folks for himself when they had a few bucks stashed away and he could make it look like a heart attack or a accident or something. He killed an old dame this morning for six hundred dollars she had hid in her room. Enough to look like money to him, I guess. Besides, killing punks like that was fun for him. You know that's not my style, Mike. I'm no angel and Paul wasn't neither, I admit that. But killing old sick folks for a couple of C-notes each? Pah." She spat on the ground.

Mike Shayne sat there and waited.



"This citizen is named Julio," Millie said. "Julio Sanchez." She pronounced it Hooo-leo in the Spanish way. "He's got a dozen killings on his head for sure, maybe a lot more that I don't know about."

"I don't suppose you'll testify to the State's Attorney about those?" Shayne said ironically.

"I'll testify to nothing," she told him. "Even if I was willing there's folks in this town would kill to keep me off the stand and away from a Grand Jury. You know who I am, so you know why."

"Then how do we hang this Julio?" the detective asked.

"You hang him for killing Paul," she said. "I'll give him to

you like I said. His marks are on Paul's body and clothes. Besides that, I'm going to give you absolute proof that he killed Paul. Hanging proof, Mike Shayne."

"I don't suppose you turned honest citizen and want to do your duty by the Law," Shayne said. "This big yen to cooperate with the cops wouldn't stem from fear for your own neck, would it?"

"You know damned well it would, Mike. Now that he's killed Paul, whatever the reason, I probably have to be the next name on his list. That's why I want him out of the way and you know it. I can't very well go to the cops myself, not with my record in this town. You were already in this thing. Paul was waiting here for you to show up when he was killed. So I decided to wait for you and give you Julio."

There was a moment when they were both silent. Then she went on.

"Besides, Paul was my partner," she said then in a different tone. "He was a fool, but we were together a long while. Long enough for the honeymoon to wear off." She seemed almost to be talking to herself then. "I swear I was kind of fond of him still, in spite of everything. I owe it to him to see that Julio hangs. I

swear I owe at least that much to Paul and I pay my debts."

Again a long silence.

Then: "Well, let's get this show on the road. Stand up Shayne. Real easy now. We're getting out of here. I'll tell you which way to go and how to behave, and I'll be right in back of you with this cannon pointed where it can blow out your kidneys or break your back if you even think wrong. You get me?"

"I get you," Shayne said. "Only one thing, Millie. If I'm going to take this Julio, I need my own gun."

"You leave your rod lay right where it is," she commanded harshly. "If and when you need a roscoe, Mike, I'll see that you get one. Now step along out, big man."

X

MILLIE LOVE had the gun and there was nothing Mike Shayne could do about it. He certainly didn't like this one. Here she told him she was going to give him this Julio—a murderer many times over and a powerful and dangerous man—and then wouldn't let him have his own gun. Shayne began to wonder who was about to be given to whom.

"At least bring it along," he said and indicated his own

forty-five on the ground. "When I need a gun, I can do a lot better with my own than with one I'm not familiar with. You carry it, if you don't trust me now. Give it to me later."

"Get on with it," was all she said.

"If the cops find Paul," he tried again, "and my gun near him, they'll think I did him in."

"That's your worry, not mine," Millie Love said. "Anyway the fuzz are your friends. When you bring in Julio they won't bother you about Paul. They'll have their killer."

That much was true enough—if he could bring in Julio without a gun.

"I'm not going to say it again," she said. "Get going, Mike."

They went in Mike Shayne's own car. Millie Love might have her own parked nearby, or she might have walked up to the old railroad yards from the Friendly Rest Home. It was only about a mile.

Millie got in the back seat where she could keep Shayne under the gun.

"Just drive where I say," she ordered. "I'm taking you to Julio's place. Believe me, you couldn't get in by yourself. Not in a million years. He has friends to warn him and stop you while he cuts out."

"If they see me bring you

under the gun, though, nobody'll bother us. They know me. When we get inside, you go ahead and take him. I'll show you where he has money hidden. Jewelry and papers and stuff to tie him to the old folks he killed. You can take a suitcase full of evidence to your pal Gentry."

"Why would a killer keep that sort of stuff?"

"Because he's a fool," she said. "Because he feels safe. Why shouldn't he? All this time the Law never came near him. If he hadn't killed Paul, he would be safe now."

"Suppose I don't take him," Shayne asked to see how she would answer. "Suppose he takes me? What about you then?"

"I brought you to him under the gun, didn't I? He won't know I'm not on his side. Besides I'll still have the gun. You and Julio are both big men, Mike, but I never yet seen any man was bigger than a gun."

"You play both ends against the middle, don't you?" Shayne said as he drove. "You're like this Julio. You figure you can't lose either way."

"I'm not like Julio," she said. "I think things out where he just hopes and guesses. I think with my brain, but Julio does it with his gut. You going

to play it my way, Shayne, or do I let you have it in the back of the head right now? Make up your mind!"

Mike Shayne was doing a lot of fast thinking. He had to decide how much of her story to believe and how much had to be reinterpreted. On the surface, what she had told him this night could be true. At least he figured some of it was. He was trying to think ahead of her and fill in the other parts correctly. His life depended on his ability to do it. He was under no illusions about that.

"I'll go along with you, Millie," he said. "Put the gun away. We're in the middle of town. If I wanted out, all I have to do is crash this car into something. You're going to have to be honest with me though."

"I have been honest, Mike."

"Most of your story I buy. Only one thing I have to know. You know you could have given me my gun and an address, and I could get to this Julio if he had an army guarding him. You aren't coming along to protect me, but because you have to be there when I take him. Why?"

"You're so smart, you tell me."

"I'll trade you for the truth, Millie. I think this guy Julio has something you have to get your hands on before the Law shows

up. That's why you have to be there when I take him."

Millie Love said nothing.

"Okay then," Shayne said. "I'll make a deal. I don't care what you want. Evidence against you and Paul for something, I suppose. I'll help you get it, but I want one thing in return. I want to know if Julio killed a man named Sam Willison, and I want to be able to prove it. Deal?"

She burst into laughter. "So that's why you came into this and got Paul killed. My God, Mike! For a nothing like that Willison! Yeah, Julio killed him. He forced him to eat a whole bottle of pills. He was so scared of Julio he wouldn't say no even if it killed him."

"Thanks," Shayne said bitterly. "How do I prove it?"

"Julio was a worse fool than you could believe," she said. "He kept a diary. It'll be there in his own writing."

XI

JULIO SANCHEZ lived in the central section of the City of Miami proper which had come to be called Little Havana since the great air lift migration of Cuban refugees had poured literally hundreds of thousands of Spanish speaking people into the metropolis. Most of the new arrivals were respectable, am-

bitious and hard working men and women who were both an asset and a credit to the community.

A minority were not, and this minority tended to cluster together in rundown sections close to the river. It was into the worst and most notorious of these inner cities that Millie Love directed Mike Shayne. The area wasn't exclusively Spanish, of course. Some blacks and Anglos lived there too. It was exclusively hoodlum and extremely dangerous for an outsider to go into.

Mike Shayne knew the section from the old days, but even he was astounded at the extent to which it had deteriorated. Many of the buildings seemed about to literally collapse inward upon themselves. Small grocery stores with Spanish language signs, disreputable eating places and bars. The few people on the streets were either furtive or brazen in their manner.

Millie Love told Shayne where to park. As he did so another car pulled to a stop a block behind them. No one got out. Shayne wondered if he was being followed, or if Millie was. If so he hardly dared hope that the shadower was anyone friendly to himself.

The woman didn't give him any time for speculation, but

pointed him down a narrow alley between two decrepit tenements. Back of that was an empty, weed-grown lot where rats scurried out of their way. Across the street from the lot was a fenced junkyard heaped with rusted old car bodies, and a house. Both backed up to the slow, murky waters of one of the little canals that branched out of the Miami River in this section of town.

Millie pointed to the house. "That's where we're going."

It had once been a comfortable, even expensive, frame two-story bungalow with a sloping shingled roof and a wide porch in front for Sunday afternoon lemonade and sitting out. Now it was sadly run down.

There were lights in the ground floor rooms, but heavy drapes had been drawn so that it was impossible to see inside. A heavy and brooding air of menace seemed to shroud the whole place.

Millie Love came up on the wide old porch with Shayne and knocked on the door, a quick, rhythmic tattoo that the big detective was sure must be a code known to the man inside.

He heard heavy footsteps inside and someone opened the door just a crack and held it there.

"It's me, Julio," the woman

said. "I've brought the goods you wanted."

Mike Shayne didn't wait any longer. He raised one big foot and kicked against the door as hard as he could.

If the man inside had been braced to resist, Shayne might have broken his ankle. It would have been trying to kick down a log stockade.

Julio wasn't braced though. He had begun to pull the door inward to open it for the woman, and the sudden and smashing attack caught him completely offguard. He was forced back two or three steps, and Mike Shayne got into the room.

He whirled round to face the man and almost gasped in surprise. Julio was big all right. He stood at least six foot six in the white tennis shoes he was wearing. Besides the shoes he had on white hospital pants and a sport shirt that was size extra-large and still bulged over his chest till the buttons were ready to pop. His arms and biceps were at least as big and muscular as those of a champion weight lifter.

The hands were immense, with powerful, hooked fingers, nails almost like claws and a mat of black hair on the back of each. The face was square, brutal and gaping in surprise.

He wore his greasy black hair in a shoulder-length tangle.

Mike Shayne got a quick glimpse of course. He hadn't time to analyze what he saw as he swung a terrific, looping right hand punch at the man's jaw. One of Shayne's long rights would normally knock down a bull.

It didn't knock down Julio. He didn't have time to roll away from the punch. Maybe he didn't even see it coming.

Shayne's fist connected solidly with a force that came close to breaking his own wrist. It was like slugging the bronze statue of Columbus over in Bayfront Park.

Julio didn't stagger or even give back a step. He stood there and took the punch without flinching. The pain that flashed up the detective's arm from that blow almost paralyzed it, but as far as Julio was concerned, he might have been slapped with a wet towel.

The two immense hands hooked up and in towards Mike Shayne's face, but he wasn't punching. He was taking a judo hold with a skill born of long experience. Shayne recognized it instantly as a hold long thought to be unbreakable.

Julio crossed his arms as he went for Mike Shayne's throat. With his right hand he gripped the right side of Shayne's coat

collar; while his left, which had crossed over the right wrist, gripped the left side of the collar.

This was a classic example of the judo master's way of gaining holds on his victim's clothing. But the tightening of the coat collar to make it a garrote was not the only part of this attack.

Julio applied strangling force by drawing his fists together, but in so doing, he supplied cruel and steadily increasing pressure on Shayne's throat with his right forearm.

Shayne knew that once that hold was applied it was virtually impossible for him to get at his attacker's hands to break the hold. The fingers had more than a throat hold, they were also twisted into the cloth of the coat collar.

The crossed arms let Julio press his elbows so close against the detective that they were safe from an edge-of-the-hand hack that might have hit the nerve.

Similarly his own big chest was so close to his folded arms that his foe had no possible way of worming his hands up between the arms for the standard hold break.

Julio also tried to pump his knee up into Shayne's groin or abdomen for a paralyzing blow, but the detective was able to

throw a block with his own knee.

That still didn't give Shayne any grace as far as the throttling tactics were concerned. That terrible pressure grew more and more and he knew that the time before he would black out and then die was growing short.

There was still one possible way of nullifying this awful attack. Mike Shayne had seen it demonstrated by a professional Black Belt wrestler years before and he tried it now.

He arched his own body back as far away from the giant Julio as he could make it go. Then he got his right hand in between them, pointed the hand by joining and stiffening his fingers and driving the pointed hand with a mighty and convulsive counter jab right into Julio's solar plexus.

The big strangler must have been overconfident. He hadn't been ready for that counter and Mike Shayne had delivered it perfectly. Julio's wind went out and he was briefly shocked into paralysis.

Mike Shayne didn't waste a single split micro-second of the time his sudden counter attack had gained him. As the jab made Julio lose his hold and bend forward instinctively, Shayne's own two big hands locked behind the head and forced Julio's face forward and

down. As he did so Shayne brought up his own knee and slammed it against the dazed and gasping giant's left ear.

Then he stepped back swiftly, letting go his hold. As Julio fell forward, Shayne brought up his foot in a kick like a football player attempting a field goal. The kick to Julio's head almost tore it off his shoulders.

That ended the fight. Big Julio was down and unconscious on the floor.

Shayne himself was still shaken and gasping for air. He stood there swaying back and forth on his feet. It was as narrow an escape from death as Shayne had had in a long while and he knew it. If he hadn't happened to have seen the demonstration of the one possible way to break that unbreakable strangler's hold, Big Julio would have one more entry to make in his diary of death.

The thought of the diary made him turn towards Millie Love. She had followed him in off the porch and stood there with the police positive thirty-eight revolver still in her hand. She was looking at them both and her face held the same expression of cruel glee that Shayne had seen on the visages of spectators at bull fights and cockfights.

He had the irrational impression that he ought to cut off one of Julio's ears and give it to her.

"Why didn't you shoot him?" he asked. "You could at least have broken his leg or shoulder or something. He almost had me there for a moment?"

"I know that," she said, "but you told me you could take him. I wanted to let you prove it. Besides you did in the end."

"This is no spectator sport," Shayne said. "Next time anybody gets that close to me, you shoot him."

She bared her teeth in a grin like a fox's. "Maybe I'll shoot you instead, Mike. Why should I love you? If this hadn't been the one who killed my Paul, maybe I'd have shot you this time. Anyway stop your beefing. You got him for fair."

She had a point there.

"Okay," he said then. "I won't argue it. Where's that diary you promised me? And whatever it is you want. Let's get them so I can call in the cops before some of this big grizzly bear's chums come looking for him."

"Nobody's coming," she said. "Everybody ever met Julio hates him. Everybody. He has no friends."

"What you're looking for,

Mike, is an old fashioned tin dispatch box about twelve inches by six by four deep. The diary and what I want are both in it. You find it for me, Mike. Start by searching this room, and remember I still have the gun."

He began by searching the area in which he had fought big Julio. He did a thorough job, even pulling the couch apart by sheer strength, but he found no tin box and no hiding place big enough to hold one.

"Try the front bedroom next," she said. "Me and my gun will be right with you."

"How about him?" He jerked his thumb at Julio on the floor. "Suppose he comes to?"

"He won't wake up for a week after that kick you gave him," Millie Love sneered. "I think you broke his neck. Anyway, I still have the gun, don't I?"

She indubitably did.

Mike Shayne didn't find any tin box in the front bedroom. Millie stood in the doorway with the gun and watched him to make sure.

He did find that the carpeting over between the bed and the window had been soaked with blood. The blood was mostly dry, but there had been an awful lot of it. Julio had pulled the bed over to cover part of the stain. He

didn't say anything about the blood, and he couldn't tell if Millie could see it from way over by the door. If she did, she didn't comment either.

The hiding place he was looking for was in the floor of the closet in the second bedroom.

"They all think they're so smart," Shayne said as he lifted the home made trap door from the floor, "but I've yet to see one of them think of a really new place to hide anything. Not even a half-way decent hiding place."

"Don't worry about that," Millie Love said from the doorway of the bedroom. "Is the box I want down there in that hole?"

"Millie," Shayne said as he got back up from the floor with the tin despatch box under his arm. "Millie, I think maybe it's time you told me the truth for a change."

"I've told you the truth, Mike. Hand over that box and you'll see I meant everything I said."

"There isn't any diary in this box," Shayne said. "There never was. Not even that big ape in there on the floor could be dumb enough to take notes that will hang him. You knew that all along."

"Why would I tell you there was a diary if there wasn't?"

she asked. "You look and see if there isn't one."

"If I look in this box, I'm dead," Mike Shayne said. "What's in here is the evidence to tie you and Paul Amor to the killing of a lot of helpless old nobodies. That and maybe cash or bank books. That's why you brought me here. You figured I could maybe take this Julio for you. Even with a gun you weren't quite sure you could do it by yourself, so you brought old Shayne along to do the fighting."

"You're crazy, Mike. It was just what I said."

"Not a bit of it."

She looked at him for a minute as if thinking over what he'd said. Then: "Okay. If you're so smart, you tell me what the truth is."

Shayne watched her closely, hoping she'd let her guard down for an instant and give him the opening he needed. He was talking for his life now and he knew it perfectly well.

She didn't relax. The gun in her hand still covered him every second.

"I'll tell you, Millie," Shayne said. "You and this Paul Amor had a good thing in the Friendly Rest, but you were thieves and you couldn't let well enough alone. I guess it started with getting your guests to take out insurance policies

for you. Then you got tired of waiting for them to die. It didn't take much. A dose of the wrong medication maybe, or not giving doses that were needed.

"I don't suppose it even seemed like murder to start with. Just letting something happen that was going to happen anyway. You probably thought you did some of them a favor by putting them out of their pain. That sort of thing starts small and gets big like a landslide."

She said nothing but he could see by her eyes that his words were scoring.

"Then along came Julio," Shayne continued. "He did the dirty work from then on. He loved it, and you paid him well. Only Julio got greedy too. Like with Willison, he couldn't even wait till the man checked in, and there were other jobs he did on his own. You figured too he was holding out some of the take on you.

"You're smart, Millie. You knew things were getting to a danger point. The dead were nobodies, but sooner or later somebody would smell a rat. It scared you.

"Well, somebody did. Willison's insurance firm called me in. When I showed at the Home you knew me, and it scared you worse. It scared Amor when

you told him. He never did have your nerve. He was going to panic and cut out on you, I suppose. You had to figure an out to save yourself. Am I right?"

She said, "Tell me the rest."

"You called my office and set up the railroad yard meet. Lucy said the voice might have been a woman's. Then you told Julio that Paul was running out. The first thing Julio did was grab this box I'm holding and bring it here. You hadn't counted on that, but it didn't stop you. You or Julio got Paul to come to this house and Julio killed him in the front bedroom. If it hadn't been for the box being missing then you'd have cut out right away, but you had to have that box."

"You decided to trick me into getting it for you. You had Julio dump Paul's body in that shack and then sent him back here to wait for you. You said you'd call the cops when I showed up to meet Paul, and have me blamed for his murder. That's why you left my gun there, just in case. Julio fell for it. Maybe he didn't know you knew he had the box. If you'd come back here alone, he would probably have killed you and put your body in the canal. Instead you brought me to take him."

Millie Love almost smiled



then. "You see, Mike, I had no choice. I needed you to get the box and get rid of Julio for me. Just like I've no choice now. I have to shoot you and finish off Julio. When the cops find you both dead here, they'll figure you killed each other. No hard feelings, Mike. I hate to kill anybody man enough to take Julio like you did. I simply have to do it is all."

"It won't work," Shayne said and hoped he sounded convincing.

"Oh, but it will."

There was a crash that made them both jump. Something smashed through the glass of the bedroom window, scatter-

ing knife edged slivers of glass all over the floor.

Millie Love shifted her hand and pumped three thirty-eight slugs through the window.

Shayne got only a glimpse of the object that had been hurled through the window, but he jumped and caught it almost before it hit the floor.

It was a black forty-five Colt's. His own gun.

He had it levelled at Millie Love before she could recover enough to swing her own gun back in his direction.

She saw the look on the big man's face. She dropped her gun to the floor.

"Whoever you are out there, come in," Shayne said. "And thanks."

The face of Tom Rumbo appeared at the window. "Think nothing of it, Mr. Shayne," the little man said. "Us detectives has got to stick together."

An hour later Rumbo and Shayne were back in Chief Will Gentry's office and the brandy bottle was on the desk.

"I couldn't let Mr. Shayne go into danger like that," Tom Rumbo was explaining. "Between one detective and another it wouldn't be ethical. Besides I remembered something else I had to tell him."

"When Miss Lucy had to go to the washroom I took her car

keys and slipped out. Mr. Shayne had told us where he was to meet the man so I went there. I saw the woman capture him and I listened to what they said. Then I followed them to Julio's house in Miss Lucy's car and listened outside. When I saw she was going to shoot Mr. Shayne, I had to do something."

"Why didn't you shoot instead of throwing in the gun?" Gentry asked.

"Chief," the little man said, "I never handled one of them guns before. I didn't know how to take the safety off."

Both big men roared with laughter. Then Shayne said: "You did fine, Tom. But what was the thing you had to tell me that was so important?"

"I kept thinking," Rumbo said. "You were after Big Hans. Well it suddenly come to me that Sam Willison didn't always talk so clear. You hadn't found no Hans, but could it have been Big Hands he said all along? H-A-N-D-S? Hands?"

Shayne and Gentry looked at each other. "That character you put in the prison ward at the hospital sure has the biggest hands I ever saw on a human being," Gentry said.

"Tom," Mike Shayne said to the little old man, "You're a real detective. You think like one. Have another snort. You earned it this day."



THE CRITIC

She had said my murder plot wouldn't work. I'd soon show her—in a most final, deadly way...

by RICHARD DEMING

ELLEN AND I were still newly-weds when I wrote my first mystery novel. I proofread it aloud to her evenings each time I finished a chapter. She listened with rapt attention, and every time I came to the end of a chapter, she would throw her arms about my neck and say, "Tom, it's absolutely wonderful!"

The night I read her the last chapter, instead of throwing her



arms about my neck, she sat staring at me with an expression of awe on her face.

Finally she said in a tone of absolute conviction, "Tom, it's better than any mystery novel I ever read."

Then she threw her arms about my neck.

Her good judgment as a literary critic is a matter of literary history. MY FAVORITE MONSTER, by Thomas Gannon, won the annual Edgar Award that year from the Mystery Writers of America for Best First Mystery Novel of the Year.

Except for a few well-known mystery writers, there is not as much money in the mystery field as the general public seems to think. The rueful motto of the Mystery Writers of America, an organization dedicated to the betterment of the poor mystery writer's condition, is: "Crime does not pay—enough." MY FAVORITE MONSTER earned \$4,000 the first year, and its eventual total earnings, including translations into twelve different languages, came to just over \$9,000, spread over a period of five years.

The initial publisher's advance against royalties of \$3,000 made us envision vast wealth, however, and on the basis of the advance I quit my

accounting job to devote full time to writing.

Six months after publication of the book our vision of wealth dissolved when the first semi-annual royalty statement came in. The book had so far earned \$3,500 in royalties, which, after the deduction of the \$3,000 advance against royalties, brought us a check for \$500.

Nevertheless my switch of careers turned out to be economically wise. By writing three books a year I managed to earn more than I ever had as an accountant. None of my subsequent books over the next ten years earned as much as the first, but they all did fairly well, their total incomes amounting to anywhere from \$5,000 to \$8,000. My annual income consistently hovered somewhere around the \$20,000 mark.

There was always the chance of the big break, too, which added some zest to life. Twice we came close. A major slick magazine considered running one of my books as a serial, at a buying price of \$20,000, then finally decided not to. A Hollywood producer bought an option on movie rights on another book for \$1,000, with the understanding that if he exercised the option, he would pay an additional \$49,000. Then he let the option lapse.

We lived pretty well, though. We had a \$40,000 home on the beach, belonged to a country club, and bought a new car every two years.

And we were happy. After ten years of marriage we were still in love, a matter that seemed to surprise some of our friends because we spent so much time together. As Ellen didn't work and we had no children, she devoted a lot of attention to me. Our friends seemed to think that ought to make us sick of each other, but we both thrived on it.

Ellen's mother seemed even more surprised than our friends at how well we got along, although her surprise wasn't based on the amount of time we spent together. She just thought all marriages were eventually doomed because all men were rats. Ellen's father had deserted her mother when Ellen was quite small, and I gathered that Mother Bellman's reasoning was that if a man would desert as fine a person as her, no woman was safe from male treachery.

Mother Bellman never understood why Ellen had permitted me to quit a perfectly good job for anything as speculative as writing. I think she was actually pleased when things started to go wrong with my career. And her crowing I-told-you-so atti-

tude certainly did nothing to help.

Things first started to go wrong with my sixteenth book, SENTIMENTAL KILLER, the first one for which Ellen failed to show her usual unbridled enthusiasm. I always proofread my books aloud to her, and up until SENTIMENTAL KILLER she was my number one fan.

For instance, the evening I read to her the last chapter of my second book, HEY, MR. MURDERER! she sat staring at me with that same expression of awe on her face she had worn when I finished the first book.

Just before throwing her arms about my neck, she said, "Tom, it's as good as MY FAVORITE MONSTER!"

Her critical judgement proved right again. HEY, MR. MURDERER! won no awards, but it drew good reviews and had a pretty fair sale. It eventually made us \$7,500.

She was just as enthusiastic about all my other books during the first ten years of my writing career—up until SENTIMENTAL KILLER. She was particularly enthusiastic about the two that nearly hit the jackpot, which seemed to indicate, to me at least, that the intensity of her reaction was directly proportional to the eventual success of my books.

Over the years I developed a strong reliance on her critical judgment.

When I began work on my sixteenth mystery novel, as usual I read chapters to her each evening as I finished them. For the first half of SENTIMENTAL KILLER she listened as raptly as she always had, and her reactions were as enthusiastic as usual. But the evening I passed the midway point of the book, I sensed a subtle difference in her reaction.

"It's really good, Tom," she said, but her enthusiasm sounded forced.

"You didn't like it," I said.

She gazed at me wide-eyed. "Why do you say that?"

"I can tell by your tone. And you didn't give me my usual hug."

Getting up, she dropped onto my lap and threw her arms about my neck. I remember thinking she wasn't as light as she had been as a bride. We were both now in our mid-thirties, and both had added a little weight.

"I did like it," she said. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, it somehow lacked your usual fast pace."

I said, "There's a chase scene, two fistfights and a gunfight in the chapter, for cripes sake."

"Well, yes," she said doubtfully. "Probably it's just me. I'm hardly a literary critic, you know."

But for my stuff she always had been an excellent one, and her reaction bothered me. Next morning I reread the chapter in an attempt to analyze what she had sensed wrong with it, but for the life of me I couldn't find anything wrong. I thought it literally crackled with action and suspense.

Her reaction to the next chapter was the same, and it remained unchanged clear to the end of the book.

Oh, she *said* she liked each chapter, and she even forced enthusiasm into her voice. But sometimes when I glanced up from reading, she looked as though she wasn't even listening.

And the evening I read the last chapter to her, I caught her yawning.

She told me the book was as good as all the others, though, and at least her hug was enthusiastic.

Having become used to relying so heavily on Ellen's judgment, I was a little apprehensive when I shipped the book off to my literary agent. But his reaction was as favorable as usual, and so was that of the editor at the publishing house who handled my books. I decided Ellen's

judgment wasn't as infallible as I had assumed.

It turned out to be better than that of either my agent or publisher, though. The book barely earned the advance against royalties paid me by the publisher, and sold foreign rights only in England and France, whereas my previous books routinely sold in a dozen foreign countries. It's eventual earnings came to only \$3,800.

Meantime, long before I learned how little SENTIMENTAL KILLER was going to earn, I completed my next two books. Since it took my publisher about six months after accepting a script to get it into print, and it was another six months after that before the first royalty statement was due, it was always at least a full year after I mailed off a script before I knew how successful it was going to be. Therefore I can't claim that loss of confidence because SENTIMENTAL KILLER was less successful than my previous books affected my writing of the next two. I finished both thinking that SENTIMENTAL KILLER had been a success.

It is quite possible that Ellen's reaction to the books affected my writing, though, because it became increasingly obvious that I had lost her as a fan. She pretended to like them

as much as previous ones, but I knew her too well to be fooled. She left no doubt of her real opinion the night she went sound asleep in her chair while I was proofreading to her the final chapter of my eighteenth book.

I read and reread each script, trying to pinpoint just what it was that turned her off, but they seemed to me just as good as anything I had previously written. I finally decided it was Ellen who had lost her touch as a literary critic instead of me who had lost mine as a writer.

But my seventeenth book made only \$2,000 in royalties against the \$3,000 advance, leaving an unearned balance of \$1,000, and sold no foreign rights at all. The eighteenth was turned down by my regular publisher, and was finally unloaded by my agent on one of the minor paperback houses for an advance of \$1,500. That was all it ever earned.

After that my career nosedived. And so did my marriage.

As my income dwindled, Ellen's and my life style naturally had to change. Since there was no way to keep up the payments on our beach home, we had to sell it.

We bought a two-bedroom tract house for \$15,000. One of the bedrooms became my office. We dropped out of the

country club and stopped seeing most of our friends.

This last was strictly Ellen's decision. I felt that our reduced circumstances should have no effect on our friendships, but Ellen absolutely refused to have any of the country club crowd see what she kept calling our "tacky house." And since she refused to extend any invitations, she wouldn't accept any either. Except for visits from her mother, we became virtual social recluses.

The visits from Mother Bellman increased. She had been only an occasional visitor to our beach home unless she was specifically invited, and then only if she had some actual reason to drop by, such as to bring something she had baked or help Ellen let out a dress. But now she began dropping by several times a week, for no purpose that I could determine other than to sympathize with her daughter for the condition in which she had to live, and to sniff at me.

The personal relationship between Ellen and me underwent as drastic a change as our financial situation. One of the things that had kept our relationship so close, I think, was that I had always basked in her unrestrained admiration for my writing talent. I loved her for many other reasons than just

because of her flattering opinion that I was the world's greatest mystery writer, of course, but that was probably one of the stronger elements cementing our closeness.

After my disastrous eighteenth book, Ellen stopped even pretending she liked my work. In retrospect it is hard to say why I continued, night after night, to proofread my output aloud to her. Certainly it became an ordeal for both of us. I think partly it was because it was such a deeply ingrained habit, we kept it up because neither of us wanted to admit openly that our relationship had changed.

But perhaps another motive, on my part, was simply superstition. Everything of mine Ellen had ever liked had been a literary success; everything she disliked was a failure. I kept hoping desperately I could break the run of bad luck by producing a book she liked.

I didn't succeed. On the contrary her criticisms became progressively harsher. Of my twentieth book all she said was, "It's all right, Tom, but I don't think it comes up to your previous ones." That sold to the same minor paperback publisher for the same advance of \$1,500, and never earned any more.

Of my twentieth book she said, "I hate to hurt your feel-

ings, Tom, but this one leaves me cold." It was rejected by the paperback house that had published my previous two, and eventually went to a sleazy outfit which paid only a \$750 advance. It managed to outsell the advance, but only by a couple of hundred dollars.

My subsequent books for the next couple of years all went to that same publisher. Even though I increased my output to five books a year, we could no longer exist on my earnings alone.

Ellen had to take a job. Her complexion had always been excellent, and she managed to get a job as cosmetician for a large department store. Her starting annual salary was more than my writing was bringing in.

That was another ground for discord. We had always planned together for major expenditures, such as a new car, washing machine or TV. But one morning she drove to work in our four-year-old Buick and returned that evening driving a brand-new Vega. When I suggested she might have consulted with me before making the purchase, she sharply reminded me that she was the major breadwinner in the family.

After that she frequently gave me the same reminder. And she completely took over



management of the family finances.

All this time her mother kept dropping by at regular intervals to commiserate with poor Ellen and look down her nose at me.

I will not detail the steady disintegration of our relationship, because I prefer not to think about it. But eventually we reached the point of hating each other. Neither of us openly admitted it, and we continued to observe such meaningless rituals as kisses of good-by and hello when Ellen left for work or arrived home. But deep inside we could no longer stand each other.

Still, night after night, I continued to read aloud to her. And night after night she sat and stoically listened.

I developed the curious belief that it was not my writing that was at fault, but her *listening*. I became convinced that if she would just try to listen properly, she would like what she heard, and that would make the script a success. I decided she had been influenced by her mother to try deliberately not to like my work anymore, which enraged me because I felt that put a jinx upon it. If she could only bring herself to like my writing as much as she once had, I knew I could make a comeback. I didn't want her just to pretend to like it, because that wouldn't break the spell. It had to be sincere liking.

But she continued not to like anything I did. And her criticisms became harsher and harsher. When I finished reading her the last chapter of my thirtieth book, she gave her opinion in two words.

Rising to her feet, she said, "It stinks," and stalked off to bed.

For that one my publisher cut my usual advance of \$750 to \$500.

It was then that I got the plot idea for A KILLER ANONYMOUS. The idea stemmed from a news item I read about a prominent local woman who had died of acute alcoholism. During the investigation it came out that no one at all except

her husband—not even her parents who lived only a few blocks away—had been aware that for some years the woman had been a heavy secret drinker.

The murder gimmick that evolved from this springboard was that I had the killer tie his wife to a kitchen chair, then pour whiskey down the tube until she died of acute alcoholism. When she was dead, he untied her, removed the tube, leaned her head on the kitchen table and put the empty bottle and a whiskey-stained glass in front of her.

Then he went to visit his mother-in-law, to whom he confided that he was terribly worried about his wife's drinking, and asked if she would try to talk her daughter into joining Alcoholics Anonymous. The mother-in-law returned to his house with him, where they discovered the wife dead, apparently as a result of her secret drinking.

A KILLER ANONYMOUS went beautifully from the moment I started to write it. The story line unfolded effortlessly, the characters came alive, and the suspense built until even I could barely stand it. I knew with absolute certainty that I had regained my lost talent.

The day I completed the first chapter, I casually an-

nounced after dinner that I had finished it.

"Okay," Ellen said in a resigned voice. "Soon as I stack the dishes."

"Oh, I'm not going to read it to you tonight," I said.

She gave me a surprised look.

"I've broken the jinx," I said. "This one is good. I mean really good. Better than MY FAVORITE MONSTER."

"Then why don't you want to read it to me?"

"Because your reaction, good or bad, would be bound to affect my approach. And I don't want to rock the boat. Right now I'm sure this is the best writing I've ever done, and I want to retain that feeling right up until I type *The End*. I'll read it all to you in a couple of sittings when it's completely finished."

"Well, all right," she said. "However you want to do it."

Usually a book took me about eight weeks, but I was so hot on this one that I finished it in six. Some of my enthusiasm began to rub off on Ellen. Each evening she would ask how the book was coming, and my self-satisfied answers began to convince her, too, that the jinx was broken.

By the fourth week, without my ever reading a word of the script, or telling her anything

about it, she had become as enthusiastic as I was. She grew just as certain as I was that we had a best seller.

That quite naturally improved our relationship. Ellen stopped reminding me that she was the family's main breadwinner, and began to be as admiringly attentive as she was in the early years of our marriage. I also suspect she asked her mother not to drop around so much until after I completed the script, because Mother Bellman's visits suddenly decreased.

My hate for Ellen melted away. While I can't claim that I fell back in love as deeply as on our honeymoon, I did start to develop a certain marital fondness for my wife again.

Eventually, one night after dinner, I announced, "Well, it's finished."

In the act of clearing the table, Ellen paused to stare at me. "The book?"

"Uh-huh."

"You're going to start to read it to me tonight?"

"Uh-huh. But there's a condition."

"What?"

"I don't want your chapter-by-chapter reaction. I don't even want you to comment when I finish reading tonight, because I contemplate getting only about halfway through. I want you to withhold all com-

ment until you've heard it all, then tell me your opinion of the whole book."

"Why can't you read it all to me tonight?" she asked. "This is Friday night, so I don't have to go to work tomorrow. It won't matter if we stay up all night."

"It will to me. I would get laryngitis. We'll do half tonight and half in the morning."

"All right," she agreed. "Go get the script while I scrape the dishes."

As usual we sat on opposite sides of the kitchen table while I read. The book ran twenty-eight chapters. I read aloud fourteen that night.

When I finished, I looked across at Ellen and said, "No comments, please. None at all."

"All right," she said agreeably, keeping her face expressionless.

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, I read her chapters fifteen through twenty-eight, finishing just before noon. After reading the last line, I carefully fitted the script back into its box before looking across at Ellen. Her face was still as expressionless as it had been last night.

"Okay, let's have it," I said.

She looked at me steadily for some moments before finally emitting a sigh. "I know how much you've been count-

ing on this one, Tom," she said with an element of pity in her voice. "And I'm sorry to disappoint you. But that thing isn't even going to bring a \$500 advance. It's the most unbelievable plot you've ever devised."

I gazed at her absolutely stunned, unable to believe my ears.

"What's unbelievable about it?" I eventually managed to whisper.

"Your murder method is physically impossible. There are all sorts of things wrong with it, but the most obvious is that the husband couldn't possibly tie up his wife like that without first rendering her unconscious, which presumably would mean either drugging her or knocking her out. And either would show in the autopsy. Since he didn't render her unconscious first, it's simply not believable that he could tie her up so easily. She would have brought neighbors from every direction by screaming her head off."

I started to get angry. Nit-picking always makes me angry, particularly when the nitpicker is wrong.

"You weren't listening," I said hotly. "He gagged her first."

"I was listening," she assured me. "That's something else unbelievable. He wouldn't have enough hands to hold the gag in

place, keep her from scratching his eyes out, and tie her up too. But even assuming he got that far, the minute he removed the gag, she would scream."

"I made that completely clear. He gave her no chance to scream. He shoved the rubber tubing down her throat at the same instant he removed the gag. Sometime try screaming with a rubber tube down your throat."

"Poppycock. That's a third unbelievable item. He could never have forced that tube down her throat. All she would have to do is bite down on it."

"It's a good book!" I yelled at her. "The best I've ever written! You're saying all this just to jinx it!"

She started to get angry too. "I'm saying it because your plot stinks! Your murder scheme simply isn't workable."

At that moment I hated her more than I've ever hated anyone in my life, including her mother. Jumping to my feet, I screamed at her, "I'll prove to

you it's workable, you jinx!"

I did, too. The only trouble was that Ellen's mother didn't sit at home and wait for me to call on her, as the mother-in-law of the murderer in the book had. She walked in the back door without knocking as I was withdrawing the tube from Ellen's throat, before I could untie her.

I still might have wriggled out of it by somehow disposing of Mother Bellman, but unfortunately the old bat is a judo expert.

I have the satisfaction of knowing that Ellen was totally wrong in her critical judgment, though, which ought to kill the jinx. A KILLER ANONYMOUS was accepted by my original publisher at the usual \$3,000 advance, sold foreign rights in seventeen countries, and was picked up by the Detective Book Club.

In addition the warden just delivered a letter from my agent containing the news that movie rights had sold for \$75,000.

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THE LEGEND

*They were only tawdry honky tonk doxies,
old and tired and no better than they should
be. But now they were ravaged corpses—and
some one among us must pay for their dying.*

by CLAYTON MATTHEWS

I WAS FIFTEEN the summer the Honky Tonk Killer struck our town with the shocking suddenness of a tornado.

We didn't call them B-girls then, at least not in our little East Texas town. I'm not sure the word was even in usage, in the depression thirties. They were called waitresses, but not cocktail waitresses.

Prohibition had been voted out, but Texas was still dry. The only place liquor could be bought in our county was at drugstores, and then only with a doctor's prescription, which cost twenty-five cents. Only 3.2 beer could be served legally.

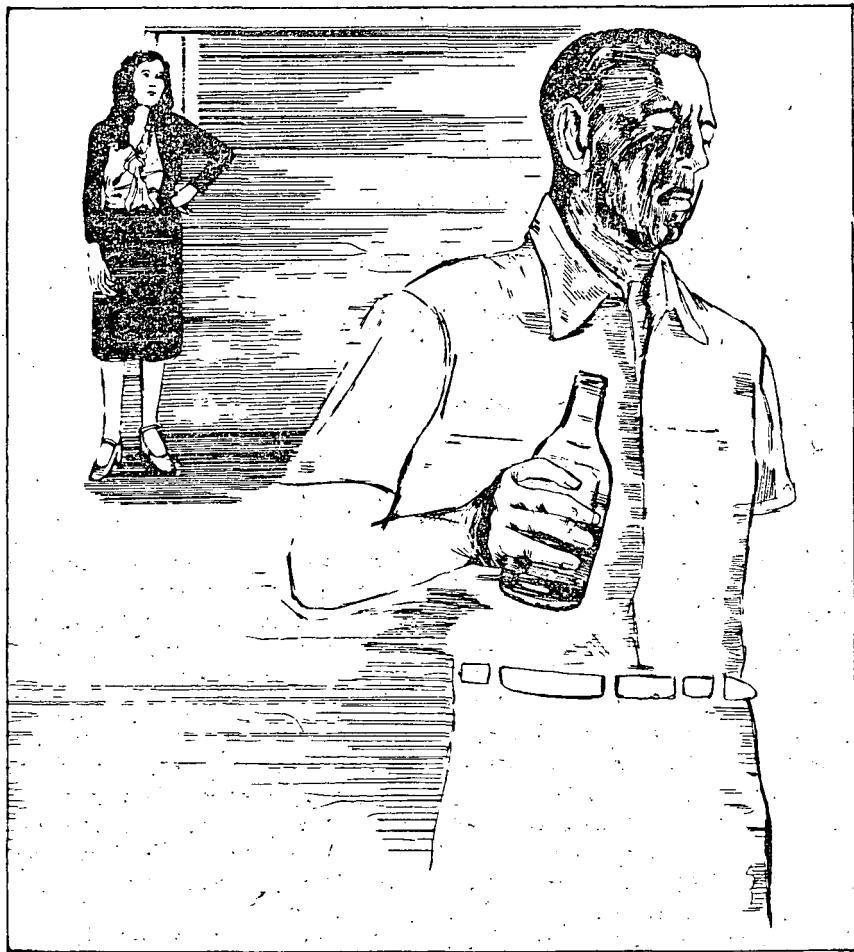
Of course, the honky tonk girls performed the same general function B-girls do today. They served 3.2 beer and setups to the customers, danced with

them to the accompaniment of raucous country western music on the huge juke boxes, flirted with them, as well as other things, I suppose.

It goes without saying that the customers were predominantly male. No unescorted girl would dare enter a honky tonk. Sometimes a man would take his girl, or his wife, but even that wasn't considered quite proper.

There was plenty of the hard stuff around to go with the setups. Aside from the drugstore whiskey, there was always a fruit jar of moon, as colorless as nitro and just as deadly, or a jug of wild mustang grape wine, a Texas product many times more potent than today's wines.

There were two honky tonks



near our town, one to the south, the other on the highway going east. Both were located by the side of the highway, low colorless buildings, drowsy and sullen by day, exploding with blaring sound and garish light by night. Both squatted like malignant growths beyond the

help of surgery, like areas of blight piously avoided by decent folks.

Of the two the one operated by Johnny One-Arm was by all odds the most popular. Two reasons were advanced for this. First, there was a row of cabins out back of Johnny One-Arm's

place. The second reason, and likely the most important, was Johnny One-Arm himself.

Every small town in those days had its legendary character, usually a little on the outlaw side, and Johnny One-Arm was ours. He was a bear of a man in his forties, a prodigious drinker, a fabled womanizer, with laughter like the sound of thunder. And he had only one arm, the left one sheared off at the shoulder socket.

The reason for the loss of the arm was obscured in myth. Some tales had it that the arm was lost in the war, others that he got it snared in a bear trap while trying to raid a still and remained captive for almost a week before being discovered. But the tale having the most currency was that he had been caught with another man's wife, and the man had come at him with an axe.

I was over at the county seat with Sheriff Jason—actually he was only a deputy, but our town called him sheriff—when I saw Johnny One-Arm for the first time. Sheriff Jason had come business in the courthouse which he had just finished, and we were getting into his Model A at the curb when these two men came boiling out of the small jail behind the courthouse. They seemed to be running side by side as they

came through the door. Then, after a few steps, they fell to the ground, rolling over and over, and I realized they were handcuffed together, and one of them had only one arm.

Then I heard the deep, rumbling sound of Johnny One-Arm's laughter. They were fighting, how I don't know to this day, since Johnny One-Arm's only arm was cuffed. But he was giving a good account of himself.

All of a sudden the sun glinted off metal as a gun barrel rose and fell, rose and fell again. Johnny One-Arm finally lay still. The other man, in sheriff's khaki, came grunting to his feet, hauling Johnny One-Arm up with him. His prisoner could still walk but just barely. He stumbled along toward the courthouse, blood dripping bright red from his hanging head.

As they disappeared inside, I asked, "Who was that man?"

Sheriff Jason put the Model A into gear and started off with a jerk. "Nobody you should know about, Kyle."

"It was Johnny One-Arm, wasn't it?"

"How come you know about him?"

"Everybody knows about Johnny One-Arm."

"I reckon they do." He took out his old, blackened pipe and

filled it, driving with one hand, gravel from the roadway spitting against the underside of the fenders like buckshot.

"What did they arrest him for?"

He held a kitchen match to the pipe and got it going before he said musingly, "I guess you're old enough—"

"I'm plenty old enough!"

He slanted a look at me, round red face faintly shocked as though he'd just counted the years himself. Then he grinned his Scattergood Baines grin. "Yep, I can see the gray hairs already." He sobered. "Johnny One-Arm was brought in on the same old charge, peddling mustang wine. He'll pay a fine and be right back with us again. But that bad temper of his is going to get him into real trouble one of these days. The madder he gets, the louder he laughs." He glanced over at me. "And fifteen or not, Kyle, if I catch you even near his place, I'll paddle your britches for you!"

That summer was the driest, the hottest on record. It hadn't rained for four months, and the temperature hadn't dropped below ninety for a month, day or night. The sandy soil glittered like bone-dust under a scalding sun. It nurtured nothing, it grew almost nothing. The river was reduced to a mere trickle. Lean catfish, white bellies slimy

with mud, lurked among the brown roots of the elms that arched out over the ever-receding water like the ribs of starving giants.

Such weather always increased the honky tonk business. The 3.2 beer was kept on ice, and the crowds provided a release for tempers made explosive by the heat. Hardly a night passed without a fist fight or two, and every Saturday night saw at least one knife cutting. Johnny One-Arm kept things pretty well under control at his place and almost never called the law in.

Naturally everybody knew about the ruckus at the county seat, and it only added to the Johnny One-Arm legend.

Several of us were playing soft ball on the school grounds and got to swapping tales we'd heard about Johnny One-Arm, each story more improbable than the other.

Billie Bob Hudson happened by and overheard us. He gave us a good talking to. "It's a good thing to have heroes to worship, especially when you're growing up, but be sure and pick on the right kind. Johnny One-Arm has all the wrong qualities."

"But teacher, Johnny One-Arm is the best around," said Roy Thatcher, a red-headed, fiesty kid my own age. "Why, I betcha he could take on John

Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd, any of them guys, and whip 'em with his one arm tied behind him!"

"Now that's just what I mean!" Billie Bob said. "Dillinger, Floyd, they're all outlaws, vicious killers, not somebody kids your age, or any age, should be looking up to."

Billie Bob boarded at Sheriff Jason's, in the spare room in back. The past term had been his first at our school. Sheriff Jason was a member of the school board and had a hand in hiring him. Always before we'd had women teachers, and we were a little in awe of Billie Bob.

He was a good teacher, quiet, soft-spoken, but he would take no sass. He wasn't a great deal older than some of his pupils. He was slender, not very tall. Some of the older boys were bigger and easily outweighed him. But he was quick and strong, as a couple of the older boys found out when they defied him. After that, Billie Bob had little trouble keeping order.

Naturally rumors followed him into our town. He had been a big football star with the Horned Frogs of Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, and it was said that he had been a high school teacher afterward for a couple of years. Nobody

seemed to know why he took a job teaching at a little school like ours.

I asked Sheriff Jason once about that, and he said, "It's the depression, Kyle. Jobs of any kind are hard to find. He's a good teacher, ain't he?"

I agreed that he was.

"Then be grateful he's here instead of somewhere else."

I liked Billie Bob. For one thing, he treated me like a grownup, didn't talk down to me. And he *did* talk to me.

Of course, after school was out for summer, he didn't have much else to do. Like Sheriff Jason said, there were no jobs to be had, much less summer jobs, so Billie Bob stayed pretty much to his room. He ate with us, and most of those hot summer nights, he'd sit on the front porch with Sheriff Jason and me, talking football, politics and the hard times, while Aunt Beth cleaned the kitchen. She was Sheriff Jason's sister and kept house for us. She wasn't really my aunt. Sheriff Jason had taken me in to raise following my mother's death.

After sitting for an hour or so, Billie Bob would go round the house to his room and read awhile. Many nights, when I got up long after midnight to stumble out to the outhouse in back, I'd see his light still on.

That evening after he'd given

us the dickens on the playground, Billie Bob picked a time when Sheriff Jason had stepped inside to say to me, "About this afternoon, Kyle. We live in hard times, dreary times. I know, it's something to do, brag on our local badmen. So long as it doesn't go beyond that, I guess it can't do much harm. But people like John Dilligner, Johnny One-Arm—they're not people to be admired. They're killers, thieves, lawbreakers. Just because we hate and blame banks for the Depression, we shouldn't admire people because they rob banks. And just because we don't agree with liquor laws, we shouldn't brag on men who break those laws, who operate honky tonks where men fight over women."

The first honky tonk killing didn't take place at Johnny One-Arm's. It happened at the other one on the highway east of town and on a Saturday night. The girl's first name was Betty Sue—we never knew her last name. She was found early Sunday morning on the creek bottom two hundred yards behind the honky tonk, strangled, tongue protruding hideously, eyes starting for her head.

The details, of course, I got secondhand, mostly from other kids passing on what their parents had told them. Sheriff



Jason was kept on the run all week, with so many people over from the Sheriff's office at the county seat. There had been killings in our little town before, and Sheriff Jason had handled them. This time, the county seat people buzzed about like nesting hornets. Not that it did them much good. At the end of the week, they hadn't the least idea who the killer was.

And by that time interest in town had died down somewhat. Who cared all that much about the death of a honky tonk girl? Nobody had even stepped forward to claim the body.

Then the second one was killed, on the very next Saturday night.

Sheriff Jason had one of the few telephones in our town. It rang shortly before eleven. By the time I got awake enough to go out into the hall, Sheriff Jason's Model A was already driving off, and Aunt Beth was back in bed.

I went out toward the outhouse. A light was on in Billie Bob's room.

Halfway to the privy, a voice spoke behind me. "That's a terrible thing, this second killing, isn't it, Kyle?"

I jumped about a foot, wheeling around. It was Billie Bob.

He nodded. "That's what the phone call was all about. I couldn't sleep and was sitting on the porch. I caught the drift of the call to Sheriff Jason." He looked tired and very, very sad. "I know folks are always saying this, but I don't know what the world is coming to. Lechery, dishonesty, thievery, murder, all everyday occurrences. Awful, Kyle, just awful. I hope you'll help make a better world when you grow up. It's too late for my generation."

The reaction of the townspeople this time was shock, outrage and undertones of fear. Two violent deaths within seven days. A honky tonk girl, sure, but who could be certain it would remain that way? It could be some maniac loose.

Who could sleep easy in their bed?

People began locking their doors for the first time within memory.

In addition, the second girl was known, a member of family right there in town. Ethel Thompson. True, Ethel had the name of a tramp long before she went to work at Johnny One-Arm's place. But she was one of our own.

Ethel was found in one of the cabins out back, strangled just like the first one. She lived there, getting free rent as part of her wages. There was some evidence that a man had been in the cabin, but nothing to point to what man. Somebody passing the cabin saw the door open, peeked in and saw Ethel. She had only been dead a short while. That was how Sheriff Jason got called in so quickly on the case.

Newspapers in Dallas and Fort Worth picked up the story. It was a natural for headlines: HONKY TONK KILLER STRIKES AGAIN!

Talk in town became ugly. Folks began sniping at Sheriff Jason, demanding he find the killer.

"They're getting mean," he said one night on the front porch. He wiped sweat from his brow. "And this heat and the dry spell ain't helping."

"Any idea at all as to the killer?" Billie Bob asked.

"Plenty of ideas, but they go off in all directions, like chickens caught out in the rain."

"If you ask me, it's that Johnny One-Arm," Aunt Beth said from the doorway.

"Now Beth," Sheriff Jason said uncomfortably, "nobody's asked you."

"Maybe somebody should," she said defiantly, hands folded over her stomach. "That man should have been run out of the county long since."

"But just because a man has a bad reputation doesn't mean he's a murderer," Billie Bob said.

"It's the best reason I know," Aunt Beth said, plump face obstinate. "Can you think of anyone else around who'd kill them poor girls?"

There was a brief silence which Sheriff Jason broke with a sigh. "That's just it, sis. We can't. Still, that doesn't mean it has to be Johnny One-Arm."

"You just wait, you'll see." With a loud sniff she went back inside.

"Awhile ago it was honky tonk tramps," Sheriff Jason said dryly. "Now it's them poor girls."

AUNT BETH wasn't the only one who thought that about Johnny One-Arm, I soon

found. Yet there were some folks who refused to believe he was the Honky Tonk Killer. How could a man with only one arm have strangled those two girls?

Naturally all the kids wanted a look inside Johnny One-Arm's place.

One afternoon Roy Thatcher said, "Kyle, let's sneak out there tonight for a peek."

I knew what Sheriff Jason would do if he learned of it, but I was eager to go. "If they catch us, we're in hot water."

"Shoot, we can run faster than any old grown-up, even Johnny One-Arm. We'll just look in the window. Maybe we'll get a gander at the Honky Tonk Killer."

I don't know how he thought we'd know him, if we saw him. Maybe he just liked the sound of it, the thrill of fear it gave him.

Of course, I agreed to go. It was on a week night. We knew we couldn't get away with it on a Saturday, there'd be too many people around. We waited until after nine, the time we were supposed to be in bed. It was easy enough to slip into my clothes and tiptoe out of the house. I'd done it before on possum-hunting expeditions and such. We met down at the corner, about a mile from the honky tonk.

We said hardly a word on the way, almost tiptoeing alongside the road, as though going past a graveyard at midnight. At the edge of the parking lot Roy nudged me and jerked his head. We slipped into the shadows of the live oaks, circling around until we were behind the honky tonk. Only three cars stood in the parking lot. Although the front blazed with light, there was but a single yellow bulb in back, on a stringer stretching between the main building and the cabins. None of the cabins showed a light.

We started toward the main building. Roy touched my arm again and whispered in my ear, "Wonder which one was where the honky tonk gal was killed?"

I whispered back, "I don't know."

"I thought, seeing's you live with Sheriff Jason, he might have told you."

"Well, he didn't!"

The thought of being that close to where someone was choked to death gave me a creepy feeling. We reached the building and moved at a crouch down to the corner, to the one grimy window, then slowly raised our eyes above the sill. The window was up a few inches, letting sound escape.

Two couples were dancing to music from the juke box, and two girls were sitting alone in a

booth. The only other person in the place was Johnny One-Arm, leaning on the counter reading a newspaper. I wasn't much of a judge of female beauty in those days, but even I realized the four girls inside wouldn't have won any prizes. Two had acne-scarred faces. All were powdered and rouged to an excess. Their dresses were ill-fitting, sweat-stained. All were old before their time.

The record came to an end, and the dancers straggled back to the booths without anyone dropping another coin in the juke box. In the sudden silence I heard a car drive up out front with a rattle of gravel. A man came in alone. He was a slender individual, red-face, swaying slightly, apparently already drunk.

Johnny One-Arm glanced up incuriously, then returned his attention to the paper.

The newcomer hitched up his pants, swaggered over to the bar and smacked it with the flat of his hand. "Gimme a drink!"

Without even looking up from the paper, Johnny One-Arm dipped his hand below the counter for a bottle of 3.2.

"Not that slop! I want something stronger!"

"You won't get it here, friend." Johnny One-Arm finally glanced up. "Even if I sold something else, I wouldn't sell

it to you. You've had too many snorts already."

"Now don't hand me that!" the man said belligerently. "You peddle the good stuff here. I know!"

Johnny One-Arm drawled, "Do you? What do you know?"

"I know you're the one they call Johnny One-Arm. Ain't that right?"

"Reckon you're right there."

"And I know you're supposed to have killed them girls..."

A change came over Johnny One-Arm. All humor left his face as he said coldly, "You'd better explain that, friend."

"What's to explain? Two tonk girls died, you killed them."

Evidently the man wasn't too drunk to read danger in Johnny One-Arm's face, for he suddenly began back-pedaling.

He was too late.

Using his one arm like a pole, Johnny One-Arm vaulted over the counter and had the man by the throat, the five fingers of his hand tightening around the other's neck like a vise. He squeezed and squeezed, and his captive began to thrash wildly, fists, knees, feet, all flailing at Johnny One-Arm. It was wasted effort; he might as well have been pounding away at a stone wall.

The fingers tightened and



tightened. The man was now pinned against the wall like an insect. After a stunned moment, the other two men in the place were now trying to pull Johnny One-Arm off.

One shouted, "Johnny, let go! You're goin' to kill him!"

I somehow had the feeling that most of the anger had drained out of Johnny One-Arm, or they would never have been able to manage it. But they did pull him loose, and his victim finally escaped, scuttling away, massaging his throat. As the man disappeared through the door, Johnny One-Arm threw his head back, laughter rumbling from him.

At the window Roy That-

cher tugged at my arm, pulling me down below the windowsill. He whispered triumphantly, "You see, Kyle, I told you we'd see the Honky Tonk Killer!"

Naturally it was all over town before you could turn around twice.

I found that out the next afternoon. Sheriff Jason often sat on an upturned Nehi box at the filling station down at the corner, pipe fuming, yarning to the men gathered around him, sometimes settling disputes. He did a lot of sheriff business there.

But the men collected around on this day weren't there for swapping yarns. They were openly hostile; the air crackled with it.

"I tell you, Jason Little, that Johnny One-Arm is the killer of them gals!"

"When that temper of his blows, he'll kill anything in his way!"

"Sure, some folks said a one-armed man couldn't do it. But not after last night."

"You don't believe us, ask Kyle yonder."

Roy Thatcher and I were hunkered down against the station wall. Sheriff Jason glanced over at us.

Before I could speak, Roy said eagerly, "That's right, Sheriff Jason! Roy and me was there, we saw it all!"

Sheriff Jason's glance rested on me in mild reproof, but he didn't say anything, which had to be a measure of how upset he was.

"You can't arrest a man just because he *could* do something," he said. "There's no proof that Johnny's the man we want."

"Did you know, Jason," a man said, "that this last one killed, Ethel Thompson, was the one told on him about peddling wild mustang?"

"That don't explain the first one."

"Could be he killed her to cover up for killing Ethel. Ever think of that?"

The third honky tonk girl was found strangled that Saturday night.

The phone rang shortly before midnight. This time Sheriff Jason was just hanging up the receiver when I shot out of my room. Aunt Beth was standing sleepily in the hall doorway.

I don't think he even saw me as he spoke to her. "Another gal was just found strangled to death back in one of Johnny's cabins. They likely wouldn't have found her until morning, but some drunk stumbled into the cabin by mistake."

"I told you about that man, Jason," Aunt Beth said darkly.

He shrugged. "I'd better get

over there; sounds like there may be trouble."

I said excitedly, "I'm going with you!"

He ignored me, starting down the hall for his room, tails of his nightshirt flapping. As I started toward my room, Aunt Beth caught me by the arm.

"You're not going anywhere, young man, much less to that den of sin." She gave my arm a pinch. "You march right back to bed."

I got dressed in the dark. I heard the Model A start up and drive off, and waited awhile longer before I eased the door open and listened. The house was quiet and still. Aunt Beth always went to sleep the minute her head hit the pillow. I tiptoed down the hall, going out the back instead of the front. I thought maybe Billie Bob would like to go with me. That way Sheriff Jason might not be so mad if he saw me there with the teacher.

His light was still on. I knocked. There was no answer. The door was unlatched. I hesitated a moment, then stepped inside, calling, "Teacher?"

The parking lot before Johnny One-Arm's place was clogged with cars, and people milled all around, men and a few boys, no women. Voices were loud, angry. There was a cleared space before one of the cabins

out back, the open door spilling yellow light outside. I saw Sheriff Jason and Johnny One-Arm inside. I could just see part of a still figure on the bed. The night was hot, even hotter than it had been before sundown. The men pressed around me were soaked with sweat, and a rank odor came from them. Billie Bob Hudson was just down the line from me, staring intently at the cabin door.

Now Sheriff Jason and Johnny One-Arm came out together to stand on the cabin steps. A mutter went up from the men around me.

"How about it, Jason? You going to arrest him now?"

"Yeah, or you going to wait until he kills another one?"

"You don't do something, we will!"

"All right, folks! Just settle down now!" Sheriff Jason waved his hands for quiet, then turned to Johnny One-Arm. "Reckon you see how it is, Johnny. I'm going to have to arrest you."

Johnny One-Arm's rumble of laughter sounded. Then an ominous silence fell. Johnny One-Arm sobered and let his glance roam over the scowling faces.

"Maybe you're right at that. Looks like I'd be safer in jail," he said. He held out his arm. "Put the cuffs on me, Sheriff."

"Now Johnny," Sheriff Jason said uncomfortably, "you know I don't tote handcuffs around with me. Just give me your word you'll come along peaceful."

"My word, Sheriff. Sure, you've got my word; if it's any good to you."

I stepped forward. "He ain't the Honky Tonk Killer!" My voice was embarrassingly high. But it continued to climb. "It's not Johnny One-Arm!"

Sheriff Jason frowned down at me. "Kyle, what are you doing here? You're supposed to be home in bed."

"Ask the teacher why he wasn't in his room tonight." I swung around to face Billie Bob. "And he wasn't in his room but the light was on, when the last honkytonk girl was killed!"

Everybody seemed to draw back as much as possible, leaving a few inches of cleared space between themselves and Billie Bob.

He stared at me in reproach. "Kyle, what are you saying?"

"I don't care," I said stubbornly. "You weren't there both times, I don't know about the first. And tonight I found this letter in your room." I pulled a sheet of paper from my pocket and waved it.

"Give me that!" Billie Bob lunged at me.

"All right now." Sheriff Jason stepped between us. "Let me have the letter, Kyle."

The men closed in tightly around Billie Bob now as I handed over the single sheet of paper. Sheriff Jason ran his glance over it once, then read aloud:

Sugar I'm right sorry you all feel that way. But I can't see it's my fault you got let out teaching in Fort Worth cause it came out you was going around with a honky tonk girl. You knew what I was when you started up. I know you asked me to marry you, Billie Bob. But I make twice more honky tonking than you do teaching. And I'm sorry you're stuck in that tank town, but I can't come join you, Billie Bob. I got me a new feller. An oilfield driller, makes good money. And does he ever like to spend it! Sincerely, Joy.

"Sincerely," Billie Bob said bitterly. "She was anything but that. She is one of the devil's own, pretty as a doll, but evil to the depths of her soul!"

"Were the others evil, Billie Bob? Betty Sue? Ethel Thompson? The one..." Sheriff Jason jerked his thumb. "...in there?"

"Yes!"

"The one in Fort Worth, she cost you your job, your good name. That's why you're down

to teaching here. And this letter—" Sheriff Jason glanced down at it. "It's dated the week Betty Sue was strangled. It was the last straw. Something went out of whack."

Billie Bob's hands jumped, one crawling up his shirt front, fingers plucking at the buttons. "I'm not crazy!"

"No, you're not crazy." Sheriff Jason's voice was gentle. "But you killed those girls, didn't you, Billie Bob?"

There was a long silence, not even a cough breaking it. The only sound was made by bugs splattering against the light bulb dangling almost over my head.

Then Billie Bob made a choking sound. "A man tries to be decent and then makes one mistake with some slut. They were all no good, worthless, good for nothing but to drink with men and take their money!"

"Maybe they were all of that, Billie Bob, but that's hardly a reason to—"

Sheriff Jason stepped forward to take Billie Bob's arm. "Come along. I'll take you over to the county seat." he looked over at me. "You go along home now, Kyle, it's late."

As Sheriff Jason led him away, Billie Bob glanced back over his shoulder. "You all have to understand. I didn't *want* to kill them. It just seemed I had to, that I was *meant* to!"

The crowd was still silent, although feet shuffled now, and throats were cleared noisily. A few began edging away.

The silence was broken by Johnny One-Arm's laughter. "Well! Since the excitement seems to be over, men, why don't you all step inside, and I'll sort of set 'em up on the house?"

The men, not looking at each other and not looking at Johnny One-Arm, drifted away one by one.

Within a very short time, the last car had pulled away. They were all gone.

I looked up at Johnny One-Arm. He hadn't moved from the steps.

Now he laughed again, but it was a muted, harsh sound, not his usual booming mirth. "Like Sheriff Jason said, kid, you'd better go along home." Johnny One-Arm's lips had a bitter curl. "It's rather late, and you're just a little young for honky tonking."

Coming Soon: Another CLAYTON MATTHEWS Thriller

Misshappen, monstrously evil, a spawn of Brooklyn's worst slum was to muscle and murder his way to gangland leadership, defying both the Brotherhood and the police. Micky Cohen has escaped death—so far. But he lives in fear, knowing each day may be his last on earth. Meet—

VIOLENT MICKEY COHEN



An Amazing TRUE CRIME Masterpiece

by DAVID MAZROFF

THERE IS no formal beginning to the story of Mickey Cohen, and as this is being written, no end. Mickey Cohen is still in prison. He was attacked there by cons on more than one occasion. There are no guns in the pen for men like him, and no bodyguards. There is a good chance he may be killed before he is released. If he is, it would surprise no one, because Mickey Cohen is notorious for his big

mouth and his penchant for antagonizing men.

In the decade before 1951, when Cohen went to prison, gangland warfare and slayings in Los Angeles had become as regular as the rising sun. From 1951 until 1955, while Cohen was sitting it out in a prison cell, there wasn't a single gangland killing in Los Angeles. The sudden quietude, the almost unbelievable serenity which swept

" I NEVER KILLED A MAN
WHO DIDN'T DESERVE IT"



over the city was understandable. Mickey Cohen had been taken off the streets.

No gangster in America's black history of underworld mischief had a more lethal record of beatings, shootings, torture, and murder than this pint-sized would-be Napoleon.

Mickey Cohen, nee Meyer Harris Cohen, was born in 1913 in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, New York. It was the very same area which spawned Lepke Buchalter and Gurrah Shapiro of Murder, Inc., Frankie Yale, Albert Anastasia,

Bugsy Siegel, and hundreds of others who found their way into prisons, the morgue, or in dirty alleys bleeding and dying or dead from underworld guns.

Mickey Cohen was the youngest of six children of a Russian immigrant who was a produce peddler and dealer. The father died when Mickey was only three months old so he never really knew he had a father. His mother, a typical God-fearing Jewish woman, was beside herself as to what to do about her *mizhinik*, the youngest of her brood. At an early

age, Cohen indicated that he was a violent non-conformist with society and its rules.

The family moved to Los Angeles, into the squalid, teeming section of Boyle Heights, which is like the ghettos of New York City, or any other large city. The move from Brownsville to Boyle Heights was no improvement, as Mrs. Cohen had hoped it would be.

Mickey Cohen started out on his depredations while in knee pants. He sold newspapers which he stole from other kids or from newsstands, robbed fruits and vegetables from pushcarts and, when the unfortunate peddler protested or attempted to stop the young hoodlum, Cohen turned over the pushcart and sent the peddler's wares tumbling into the street. He hustled craps, poker games, and anything else that would bring him a buck. That was his goal, the buck, his passport out of the ghetto.

Strangely enough, he was an apt pupil in school and had a fine potential, according to his teachers, a potential which never materialized. He was a bully in the schoolyard, fought other boys and won most of his fights. He then began hanging around the gyms where such name fighters as Fidel LaBarba, Jackie Fields, Newsboy Brown, Mushy Callahan, and other top-

notch ringmen trained. He was fascinated by the lure of the boxing game and the crowd, the hustlers, trainers, managers, promoters, and newspaper men. He badgered name fighters to teach him the art of professional fighting.

Before he entered Boyle Heights Junior High School he was boxing at club smokers. He began skipping school and got into trouble with truant officers. When he was fifteen he was transferred to a high school for incorrigible delinquents. That didn't suit him either and he ran away from home. He hitchhiked to Cleveland, where an older brother lived.

In Cleveland, Mickey Cohen sought out a gym where fighters trained and began working out. He was matched with fighters in his own class in the smaller clubs in and around Cleveland. After two years he went to Chicago, where he fought some main events but never showed the promise of a champion or near-champion. He was battered around by good featherweights in every fight. With only a broken nose to show for his battles in the ring, he gave up the hope of ever achieving a title and turned to gambling. Here, too, he was small-time.

An operator of a book, Syndicate controlled, hired Cohen to pick up bets and to

collect from losers. This was right up Cohen's alley. Knowing he had the Syndicate behind him, he muscled gamblers who were behind in their payments. His quick fists and hair-trigger temper resulted in many beatings which he administered to those who didn't meet his demands to pay off. His reputation for collecting from losers spread to Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, Al Capone's bagman.

"You're a pretty bright guy," Guzik said. "A little rough but bright. I've got some work for you. Can you follow orders?"

"You bet," Cohen replied quickly. "Right down the line."

"Good." Guzik handed him a list of names and addresses. "These guys are way behind in paying off their losses. The amounts are listed after each name. Get the money. You get ten per cent."

With Jake Guzik's power behind him, Cohen ran wild. He beat up a few important people. They complained to Frank Nitti, who had taken over the mob when Capone was sent to prison for income tax evasion. Nitti learned that Cohen was collecting for Guzik.

"Who the hell is this Mickey Cohen?" Nitti demanded.

"A good boy out of New York and Cleveland. He's get-

ting results. That's what matters," Guzik finished.

"Like hell it does! He's bringing us heat. He muscled a few important guys. I've had some calls. He's got all his brains in his hands. We don't operate like that, Jake!"

"Look, Frank, all the guys he was sent to were months behind in paying off and all I got was a lot of excuses. I gave them extensions. They didn't make one single effort to bring the amounts down. Some of them owe as much as ten grand."

"Okay! Bring me the list. I'll get the money. You take that two-bit muscleman off right now!"

"I said he's a good boy, Frank. I can use him. Who you going to put on to collect the small stuff, the hundreds and two hundreds?"

"We've got a lot of men. I'll put somebody on. Cohen is out! I don't want to argue about it."

Guzik called Cohen and told him he had to stop his collections.

"How will I live, Jake? I've got expenses."

"Tell you what? Find yourself a small place, a store, something, and open up a horse room. I'll okay it and put in the wire service for you. That okay?"

"Sure, Jake. Thanks. I'll find something."

Frank Nitti heard of it and refused to allow Cohen to run. Cohen went back to Los Angeles. He was broke. He turned to robbery. He was picked up but was released when witnesses could not or would not identify him. This was in 1933, and was the first in a series of forty arrests for every crime in the book. He was then only twenty years old, an unknown punk to the Los Angeles Police Department. He was picked up several more times in the next two years on various charges but was released for lack of evidence. He told himself the cops were stupid and couldn't convict him on anything. This kind of thinking added to Cohen's already monumental ego. He was, he assured everyone who would listen, immune to conviction and jail.

"I'm too smart for cops," he declared. His boasting appeared to be justified for while his arrest record mounted, the conviction record was bare.

Los Angeles eventually got too hot for him and he decided to return to Chicago. He sought out Jake Guzik and asked for help.

"Can't you fix it for me to open up a book?" he asked Guzik. "I'll run it nice and clean. If you need me to do

anything for you, I'll be right there."

Guzik thought about it. He knew that he would be doing the wrong thing if he okayed Cohen in the face of Frank Nitti's order that Cohen was not to operate in Chicago. However, he had taken a liking to Cohen for some reason. Too, he decided to test his power against that of Nitti in the Organization. He told Cohen to go ahead and open up.

Cohen opened a Lake Shore horse parlor. He did well for a while but ran into a bad streak when he was hit for a score of big wins. He needed money to pay off. He went to several gamblers, some of them legitimate businessmen, and asked for loans. When they refused he muscled them. Bad luck followed him. He was hit again. This time he took a quick trip to Cleveland, looked up an old pal named Frank Niccoli. They rigged a phony holdup of a Cleveland restaurant. The cops nailed him this time. He received a suspended sentence and two years' probation. He managed to fix the probation rap and beat it back to Chicago.

IN THE NEXT two years he was arrested half a dozen times for bookmaking, assault with a deadly weapon, and other shenanigans. Frank Nitti got wind

of Cohen again. He called Guzik.

"Jake, I thought I told you I didn't want Cohen to run in this town. What the hell are you trying to do? He's causing all kinds of heat. You tell Cohen to close up and get the hell out of town. Three days, Jake. If he isn't out of town by then he's going to wind up in the morgue."

This was no idle threat. Guzik knew that Nitti was hot-headed and when he was mad he'd just as soon do the killing himself as he would to order it. "Okay, Frank. Cohen is out. I'll deliver the message." Guzik realized that without Capone's protection he could not stand against Nitti. Capone was in Alcatraz. There was no way of getting to him. Even if he could reach Capone it would do no good. Nitti was boss.

Cohen closed up the horse room and took a train back to Los Angeles.

When Cohen arrived in Los Angeles he learned that Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel was in control on orders from the National Crime Cartel which rules the nation's underworld.

Bugsy Siegel, although a guy with a hair-trigger temper and a reputation as a killer for Murder, Inc., was the complete antithesis of Mickey Cohen. The Bug was smooth, polished,



BUGSY SIEGEL

quiet, and deadly. He was also shrewd and cunning and bossed things with an iron hand. "He did go off the deep end once and wound up a corpse. That's the way with the Syndicate. Step out of line and you're dead. It happened to a lot of the big boys—to Albert Anastasia, Willie Moretti, Dutch Schultz, Legs Diamond, and many others.

At the moment, however, Bugsy Siegel was riding high. He moved in the circle of movie stars, directors, producers, and the king-pins of the industry. He was seen with some of the loveliest stars. One of them was his mistress.

Mickey Cohen looked on and licked his chops. He hungered for everything that Siegel had, especially the big money and the beautiful women. He lacked a few items, physically and mentally. Siegel was as handsome as a movie star. Cohen was short, chunky, with a broken nose, thick lips, and a limited vocabulary that ran to Brooklynese and the vilest kind of profanity.

Morally, there was nothing to choose between them. Siegel and Cohen were both bums, vicious, atavistic, jungle marauders. Siegel could give Cohen cards and spades in viciousness.

Cohen could have risen high in the National Crime Cartel but two things were against him. His mouth was too big, and he was Jewish. The latter wouldn't have been too large a hurdle to leap because men like Abner "Longy" Zwillman, Meyer Lansky, Jake Guzik, Lepke Buchalter, and Jacob "Gurrah" Shapiro, among others, were big in the Syndicate.

The Italian people as a whole have been seriously maligned because of the notoriety of the Mafia or Cosa Nostra. Only a handful, proportionately, are involved in the rackets. But those few are as evil as they are deadly.

Mickey Cohen, during the years he was free and operating in Los Angeles, took a lot of heat off the Chicago and New York mobs, all Sicilians or Italians with a few exceptions. Cohen didn't have the kind of police protection that Bugsy Siegel had, and certainly nothing to compare with the Chicago Syndicate. It is generally known that the Windy City mob, leftovers from the days of Capone, is undoubtedly the most politically insulated and police-protected criminal organization in the world. That includes Sicily, the birthplace of the Mafia.

Mickey Cohen could not, even at the very height of his career as the top hood in Los Angeles, command the kind of protection necessary to operate illegal enterprises with immunity. His police record, as previously noted, became spotted with arrests. A man like Tony Accardo, who ran the Chicago mob for years, never served a single day in jail. Accardo, however, despite the fact that he never went beyond the sixth grade, was shrewd, clever, innately intelligent, and close-mouthed. Cohen was the exact opposite.

Cohen was more along the type of Jake "Gurrah" Shapiro or more, perhaps, like Momo Salvatore Giangono, alias Sam

Giancana. Cohen has been described as a "snarling, ill-mannered, sarcastic, sadistic psychopath." It was a justly earned description.

Bugsy Siegel took Cohen under his wing. He saw something in Cohen that reminded him of his own early days when he was a gunman and killer for Murder, Inc., a partner with Meyer Lansky in the notorious Bug and Meyer Mob. Siegel was having trouble with Jack Dragna, who had bossed things in Los Angeles prior to Siegel's coming. He felt that Cohen could serve him well in the matter of straightening out some of Dragna's hoods who were a little out of form, muscling bookies, gamblers, narcotics dealers, and whores under Siegel's protection.

"I want you to lean real heavy on these bums, Mickey," Siegel said. "Bust 'em up, put them in the hospital, break their arms and legs. Anyway, you want to do it so long as they get the kind of message I want them to get. Understand?"

"Sure, Ben. I know just what you want. Leave it to me."

Cohen quickly impressed Bugsy Siegel with his efficiency at quieting stubborn rivals. He beat more than a dozen of Dragna's hoods, roughed them up in a way he knew too well.

Most of them became hospital cases. After six months of this, Dragna sought peace with Siegel.

At this time, in 1939, a war for control of the wire-service in Chicago was going on. The Chicago Syndicate wanted to take over the wire-service which supplied thousands of handbooks across the country with information on horse races to be run and those which already had run. A handbook could not operate without this vital service which not only provided the results of each race but also furnished the win, place, and show prices.

James Ragen and Arthur B. "Mickey" McBride operated the wire service for Moses Annenberg. Annenberg was at one time circulation manager of all Hearst newspapers. As ^{Mr.}he gained knowledge of the newspaper business, from end to end, Annenberg quit Hearst and built a vast empire of his own that rivaled Hearst's newspapers. Among those newspapers and magazines were the *Philadelphia Enquirer* and the *Morning Telegraph* and *Racing Form*. His knowledge of Chicago's underworld when he rough-housed his way through the many wars for circulation supremacy aided Annenberg in taking over the wire service from Mont Tennes who first

thought of it, built it into a multi-million dollar operation, and held it for about ten years. Mont Tennes named it the General News.

Moses Annenberg went to prison for income tax evasion, and that left Ragen in full control. Mickey McBride and Louis Rothkopf were his lieutenants. Both were at one time associated with the notorious Mayfield Mob of Cleveland where Mickey Cohen tried unsuccessfully to gain a foothold. Enter now, Mickey Cohen.

Bugsy Siegel had started Trans-America in Los Angeles. The wily Siegel figured that if the Chicago mob took over the wire service from Ragen the next step would be to take over Trans-America Press, the wire service he controlled in Los Angeles and which was netting him hundreds of thousands dollars a year. He then turned to Cohen.

"You know Ragen?"

"James Ragen?"

"Yes. I knew him in Chicago."

"Do you know Mickey McBride?"

"Sure. From Cleveland. He's circulation manager of the News, I think. He's got a lot of connections."

"Like who?"

"A lot of good people. Big Al Polizzi, Gameboy Miller,

King Angersola, Sammy Haas, and a bunch of others."

"You know these people?"

"Sure. All of them."

"Okay. You go to Chicago and get in touch with Ragen. The boys there are trying to take over the wire service there. You work with Ragen."

Cohen hesitated. "Ben, Jake Guzik is a friend of mine. He gave me some breaks. I can't do that to him."

"Can you do it to me?" Siegel demanded. "Whose side are you on now? You make a choice. Me or Guzik."

"Come on, Ben. You know it's you. Hell, I couldn't go against you. You're giving me breaks too."

"Bigger ones. Okay. Go to Chicago."

The whole situation now took on the aspects of a Greek drama where the cross and double-cross was a part of every scene.

Mickey arrived in Chicago to visit his mother, so he said, who was ill with cancer. He contacted Ragen and told him he was there on orders from Siegel to render whatever aid he could in the matter of the wire service.

Cohen contacted Mickey McBride in Cleveland and told him he would like him to come to Chicago for an important business matter. Cohen talked big. He dropped Siegel's name

at every instance that he thought necessary to add to his own prestige. He was Siegel's partner. Siegel wanted Ragen to stay in control of the service. McBride came to Chicago.

In a meeting attended by Ragen, Sr., James Ragen, Jr., Jack Lynch, Louis Rothkopf, and Mickey Cohen, it was decided to fight the Syndicate, legally and otherwise.

Jack Lynch was connected with Mont Tennes and had fought Annenberg in the courts during the time that Annenberg was trying to take over the wire service. He knew the legal angles. He was paid off by Annenberg. The sum, according to the best sources of information, was over a half million dollars. What was revealed by Ragen now was a rather peculiar circumstance.

"On the day I settled with Lynch," the elder Ragen said, "I paid Frank Nitti one hundred thousand dollars. I delivered the money personally to him. A thousand one-hundred dollar bills. I can't understand why he's trying to take over the service now, after I paid him off."

"Nitti isn't the whole boss," Cohen said. "The Council of the mob has a lot to say about it. That's the Fischettis, Tony Accardo, Paul 'The Waiter' Ricca, and a couple of others.

Nitti doesn't run the whole show."

Ragen, Sr., turned to McBride. "Mickey, I want you in with me on the Service. I need your help. Also your connections in Cleveland. How about it?"

"I've got too many interests in Cleveland," McBride said. "However, I'll tell you what I'm willing to do. I'll come in and you can spread it around that I'm a partner. Since I can't be here to help you control things I suggest you make your son general manager, if he's willing." He turned to young Ragen. "How about it, Jimmy? You willing to take over?"

"Sure, if dad wants me to. I'll take it over."

"Okay. I'll put in Tommy Kelly to help things. Kelly is my brother-in-law. A good man."

"That's a good setup," Cohen said. "Siegel will approve it and do all he can to ease matters. He told me he would do that, talk to the boys in New York and ask them for their help."

"Okay," the elder Ragen said then. "I'll send word to Moë Annenberg about the new setup."

On November 15, 1939, Annenberg was officially out of the wire service business and the Ragens in, with Mickey

McBride and Tommy Kelly as partners. Mickey McBride turned over his one-third of the Service to his son, Eddie, a decent young man who was a student at Notre Dame.

The mob soon got wind of the deal. Word went out to Cohen to get out of town or be carried out. He took the next train back to Los Angeles. Actually, all he did in the deal was to get McBride to take over a third of the Service. However, as things turned out, it was enough. For the time being, anyway. However, despite what Cohen thought, the mob turned against him and Siegel. Siegel, because he had Meyer Lansky behind him; and Lucky Luciano, was too big to touch. Cohen wasn't. A half dozen attempts were made to kill him but he managed to escape each time.

BACK IN Los Angeles, Siegel congratulated Cohen.

"I'm going to give you a nice piece of action, Mickey," Siegel said. "You can open up a couple of handbooks and I'll give you my service for free. Good enough?"

Cohen smiled. "Very good, Ben. Thanks."

With Siegel's blessings, Cohen opened up a horse book behind a cigar store on Santa Monica Boulevard and another

a few blocks from Schwab's famous drug store on Hollywood Boulevard. He lasted only a short time because the heat was on. Cohen turned to Siegel.

"Play it cool, Mickey. You can open up again when the heat is off. It will only last a few weeks."

The heat was turned off and Cohen opened up again in the same two places. He had to close in short order.

On Thanksgiving Eve, Harry "Big Greenie" Greenberg, a former Murder, Inc., henchman, was knocked off and the heat was on again. It was the first gangland execution in Los Angeles and the papers howled in long editorials which focused on the racketeering going on in the city and demanded a clean-up.

There were mixed stories in the underworld as to why Greenberg was put on the spot. One story declared that Greenberg was about to talk to the cops about Murder, Inc., and his doings in it—sluggings, extortions, murders. This hardly seemed to be true because Greenberg for the past fifteen years had been close to Lepke Buchalter, Jake "Gurrah" Shapiro, Lucky Luciano, and Bugsy Siegel. He wasn't the kind to talk to the cops.

The other story, and which seemed to be the valid one, was

that he had been sent to Los Angeles to liquidate Mickey Cohen for Cohen's part in the wire service deal in Chicago. Siegel was not asked for his okay for the hit because the mob knew that the Bug had sent Cohen to Chicago to help.

At any rate, Greenberg drove to his apartment house in Los Angeles on this night, parked his car. As he did so, a black sedan drove past and poured out a barrage of bullets. Greenberg slumped over the steering wheel. He was already dead but the slugs kept pouring into his body.

The cops picked up Bugsy Siegel, Frankie Carbo, a fight promoter, Mickey Cohen, and a couple of other Siegel hoods. Cohen had an unimpeachable alibi and was turned loose. The others stayed in jail for a time but were ultimately released. If Cohen did not have an actual part in the slaying of Greenberg, the underworld grapevine said he did know who the hitmen were and why it was done.

Now, almost three thousand miles away, the inside story of the Greenberg killing came to light. The Brooklyn crime busters had Abe "Kid Twist" Reles and Allie "Tick Tock" Tannenbaum in jail and were sweating them. Both decided to talk.

Special Prosecutor Thomas E. Dewey, who almost became

President of the United States, was handling the interrogations of Tannenbaum and Reles.

"If you want any kind of breaks from us," Dewey said to Allie Tannenbaum, "you'll tell me everything you know. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Dewey."

"Now then, I have a request for information about the Harry Greenberg killing in Los Angeles. My information, gathered by my staff, is to the effect that you personally were involved in the murder. What about it?"

"Will you send me to California to stand trial if I cop out?"

"No, I won't. The Los Angeles police will try to extradite you but I'll fight it. I will also declare that since you will testify as a state's witness that you are to be granted immunity. Are you satisfied with that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay, let's have it, from start to finish."

Tannenbaum's story disclosed all the facts leading to the hit. Lepke Buchalter and Jake "Gurrah" Shapiro were on the lam, hiding out from a murder warrant. Lepke sent word that certain of the mob was to blow town. Among those ordered to do so was Greenberg.

Greenberg went to Toronto.

He was broke shortly after and sent word to Mendy Weiss, who had taken over as boss of Murder, Inc., on Lepke's orders, that he needed money. Weiss, tight-fisted, sent back word that there was no money. All the money on hand was to be used in defending Lepke and Shapiro if they were apprehended and had to stand trial.

Greenberg sent back word that he would either get the money or spill his guts. Since every member of the mob was hot, Weiss called Los Angeles and told Siegel he wanted a man to hit Greenberg. Siegel said he would send Mickey Cohen.

"Cohen knows how to track a guy down," Siegel said. "He'll do the job."

"Good. Pay him five G's. I'll forward the money."

Cohen went to Toronto. He traced Greenberg from hotel to hotel and from boarding house to boarding house, then learned that Greenberg had gone to Montreal. Cohen went back to Los Angeles. Siegel was furious.

"I said you would make the hit!" he told Cohen. "Why the hell didn't you go to Montreal?"

"Those Canuck Mounties got a line on me. I was getting hot. I thought the best thing for me to do was to get the hell out of town. What good would it have

been for me to get picked up?"

"Okay, okay," Siegel shouted. "I'll call Weiss and tell him the story. You sure Greenberg is in Montreal?"

"Yeah. First class info."

Siegel called Weiss and relayed Cohen's information. Weiss decided to make the hit himself and took a train to Montreal.

Now, Greenberg was no dunce. He knew from his own experience in the mob that anyone who threatened to talk, whether he did so or not in the end, signed his death warrant. He had to move fast. The day before Weiss arrived in Montreal, Greenberg flew the coop. He went to Detroit. The mob there called New York and was told to keep Big Greenie on hand. "We'll send a couple of boys out there."

Weiss called Siegel and told him Greenberg was in Detroit.

"Good," Siegel said. "I'll send Cohen and another man there today. He won't miss this time."

The Detroit mob was too cordial to Greenberg. He figured they must have checked with New York. He decided to blow town and go to Los Angeles! Cohen and Greenberg must have passed each other somewhere west of Chicago.

Cohen returned to Los Angeles. He was fuming. "What

the hell kind of wild goose chase are you sending me, Ben? Every time I go to where you tell me Greenberg is, he isn't!"

Siegel laughed. The situation had its humorous side. "Cool off, Mickey. Greenberg blew in town a couple of days ago. We've got him lined up."

"What now?" Cohen asked.

"I've got Whitey Krakow casing Greenberg. He'll set him up and we'll take him."

Krakow's report was to the effect that Greenberg stayed put. He was holed up in an apartment house near suburban Bel Air. The only time he went out was for a nightly drive to get a newspaper. On the evening of November 22, Thanksgiving Eve, Big Greenie went out for his newspaper.

Siegel and Frankie Carbo were parked in Siegel's Cadillac at the corner of Yucca Street. Another car with two men in it was parked a half block from Siegel's Caddy. One of the men in the second car was Allie Tennenbaum. The other man in the car was never named. The grapevine said it was Cohen.

Greenberg drove into Yucca Street and parked. It was the end of the road.

Tennenbaum was driven to San Francisco, where he took a plane back to New York.

Bugsy Siegel and Frankie Carbo were indicted for the



FRANK NITTI

Greenberg killing. Lepke Buchalter and Mendy Weiss were also indicted.

Siegel was a wild man in jail. He cursed Weiss day and night. However, he couldn't allow his vast business enterprises to fall so he named Jack Dragna and Mickey Cohen to handle things. Cohen now made headway.

He opened up half a dozen handbooks and ran a floating crap game. He also cut himself in on other operations. At this time he met and wooed LaVonne Weaver, a beautiful red-headed Hollywood model, and moved his bride into a ritzy apartment. He was on his way. He sought out the movie crowd,

starlets, stars, directors, producers, wined and dined them. He was a big shot and reveled in it. What he didn't know was that the movie crowd despised him. He was too crude, too loud, too brazen.

The Greenberg murder case fizzled and Siegel and Carbo were released. Siegel was called to New York for a conference. He told Dragna and Cohen to keep things running. Smoothly. No more rough stuff for a while.

Dragna, an old-line Sicilian chief, stuck in Cohen's craw. Dragna wanted things run peacefully, just as Siegel ordered but Cohen was all for the hustle, to move things, move up, take in everything he could. Joe and Freddy Sica, two tough hoods, Mafia oriented, kept peace between the two chiefs. The brothers had, for some reason, become close to Cohen, probably because they felt he was a comer and Dragna a hasbeen although the Sicas were on Dragna's payroll.

MICKEY COHEN now began building up his own mob. He brought Frankie Niccoli, Happy Meltzer, Hooky Rothman, a junkie, and a dozen other tough hoods. Mickey used his connections with the Mayfield Mob of Cleveland to increase his hold on Los Angeles.

Dragna knew he could not fight against such strength. Men like Louis Rothkopf, Big Al Polizzi, Gameboy Miller, Mushy Wexler, and Tommy McGinty had connections with all the mobs, from coast to coast. Why they backed Cohen and what they saw in him remains a mystery to this day.

Mickey Cohen kept the lines hot to the Hollenden Hotel in Cleveland, headquarters of the Mayfield Mob. Tony Milano, a very shrewd and intelligent member of the mob censured Cohen. In a confidential conversation with Forrest Allen of the Cleveland Press, Milano was openly critical of Cohen.

"Mickey," Milano said, "gets himself in trouble, and he gets others into a mess by using phones on every occasion. He can't write very well, or not at all, so he just grabs a phone and calls everybody in town. I gave my boys orders to stay away from him. He's big trouble."

Cohen moved away gradually from Jack Dragna and built his own territory in Los Angeles and Hollywood, a territory he held as inviolable. He was ruthless enforcing his mandates with beatings, mayhem, and the gun. On May 15, 1945, Cohen murdered Maxie Shamen.

Cohen's story was that Shaman, a bookie, came into

his paint store which Cohen used as a front for his betting and gambling operations, and threatened to kill him. Shaman reached for his gun but Cohen beat him to it, shooting him three times with a .38 pistol. Cohen turned himself into the police.

He said, "The guy just went nuts. He tried to muscle me. I don't know what the hell got into him."

Cohen never was known as a guy with a lightning draw but here he wanted everyone to believe he was a regular Billy The Kid, Doc Holliday, and Johnny Ringo all rolled into one.

The truth is that Maxie Shaman's brother Joe, another bookie, had laid off \$15,000 worth of horse bets with Cohen. The horses won and Cohen refused to pay off. Joe demanded his money or else and Cohen beat him up. Joe Shaman came back the second time and demanded his money and Cohen shot him. Maxie Shaman, a little tougher than his brother, then came to the paint store and argued with Cohen about the payoff. Maxie threatened to call the boys in Chicago and tell them about the welsh. That was when Cohen shot and killed him. Maxie Shaman didn't have a gun on him. After Cohen shot him he

put another gun in Shaman's hand.

The coroner's jury recommended that Cohen be tried for murder, but the district attorney felt there was insufficient evidence to gain a guilty verdict and Cohen was released. The verdict went to Cohen's head. He now felt that he could get away with anything.

A short time later, Cohen and Joe Sica worked over Russell Brophy, West Coast representative for Continental Press, the racing wire service controlled by Ragen, Brophy's father-in-law. Cohen and Sica beat Brophy unmercifully with their fists. Brophy charged them with the beating. Cohen and Sica were convicted of assault and paid their fines.

At this time, Bugsy Siegel turned over all his Los Angeles holdings, in escrow, to Jack Dagna and Mickey Cohen and went to Las Vegas, where he wanted to open a sumptuous hotel and gambling casino. It was to become the first of the fabulous hotels on the Strip, the famous *Flamingo*. It was to be Siegel's swan song.

As soon as Siegel left Los Angeles, Cohen turned his attention to strengthening his position and holdings. He invited Louis "Babe" Triscaro, who was to become a valued lieutenant of teamster Boss Jim

my Hoffa in Ohio, and "High Pockets" Farrinaci, a member of the Mayfield Road mob to visit him in his home. He also invited Louis Rothkopf and his wife Blanche. Blanche and LaVonne became close friends, and that friendship brought Rothkopf and Cohen closer.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, James Ragen was murdered and the Chicago mob took over Continental Press. They now set their sights on the wire service held by Siegel in Los Angeles. Trans-America was an independent, held solely by Siegel. The mob wanted it so they could tie it up with Continental Press and so control the country, coast to coast, with the one wire service.

It must be remembered that the mob held mixed feelings about Siegel and Cohen for their part in the Ragen deal. Siegel's act was an unforgivable one. Because of his association with Meyer Lansky, Siegel was a member of the inner council of the National Crime Combine. His interference in the Ragen situation was deemed as an act against the Syndicate, amounting to a virtual double-cross. Cohen was regarded as a loud-mouth upstart, unpleasant and annoying as a mosquito. Killing Siegel would require the vote and approval of the inner council. Knocking off Cohen was a routine matter, merely getting

rid of someone who was causing unnecessary trouble, in spite of the Mayfield Mob who seemed to be Cohen's Godfather.

Five attempts were made to kill Cohen. He escaped death on each occasion by one miraculous twist after another. Cohen went after the hired hit-men.

On May 2, 1946, Paulie Gibbons, a minor hood with ambition, was ambushed just outside his Beverly Hills apartment and slain. Cohen was picked up for questioning along with Benny "Meatball" Gamson, a rival of Cohen's.

Both men were grilled intensively. Detectives got nowhere. Neither would tell the cops the time of day. They were held for three days and released. A month later, Gamson was seen by detectives in a suspicious looking car. The automobile had been riddled with bullets. Gamson was taken to police headquarters.

"I don't know how those damned holes got there!" Gamson yelled. "Some crazy bastards shot it up while it was parked outside my apartment."

"Was that a warning, Benny?" a detective asked.

"A warning about what?"

"From Mickey Cohen."

Gamson snickered. "Why the hell would Cohen wanna do that? Me and him is good friends."

"That's not the way we heard it, Benny. I think we better hold you for a while for your own protection."

"I don't need no protection. From nobody, see!"

Gamson was wrong. The grapevine said that Cohen had put up Gamson's number. The price on his head was only two grand. He was small time in Cohen's estimation.

Shortly after, on August 16, 1946, two men walked calmly into Lucey's Restaurant, a fashionable dinery where movie stars often were seen, and used blackjacks to administer a savage beating to Jimmy Utley, a gambler and known associate of Gamson. One of the men covered the diners and restaurant help with a gun while the other man beat Utley. The man with the gun then used a blackjack to finish the assault. The elite patrons were horrified. Utley was rushed to a hospital. He was questioned by detectives.

"I don't know the men who did it," Utley said. "I never saw them before in my life."

All but one of the patrons in the restaurant said they could not identify the two men who beat Utley. The lone diner, a visitor to the city, picked out Cohen and Sica's pictures from the rogue's gallery. Then, after thinking it over, he said he

couldn't be sure. He was prodded by detectives but he held firmly to his statement that he couldn't be sure. Once more, Cohen and Sica got away scot free.

On October 3, 1946, Meatball Gamson and a newly arrived hood from the East named George Levinson were shot to death in Gamson's apartment on Beverly Boulevard. Gamson had imported Levinson to kill Cohen. Cohen learned of it and had both men executed. Cohen was again picked up for questioning but proved he had been a mile away at the time of the murders. Detectives, ever skeptical of Cohen's alibis, knew better but couldn't prove it, and Cohen again went free.

Cohen continued his irrational attacks on Dragna hoods and those ambitious independents who wanted to move in for a piece of the action. His beatings and shootings roamed over all dimensions of violence, brutality, and murder. He was trying to prove to everyone that he was boss of Los Angeles not only in name but in fact, and that he had replaced Bugsy Siegel, with not only Siegel's approval and blessings but that of the National Crime Cartel as well. He wasn't so much sinister as he was a thug without rhyme, reason, or direction. His

ability to avoid conviction for any of his depredations increased his already monumental vanity.

A short time after the Gamson and Levinson killings, Cohen beat up Hymie Miller, a bookie. Questioned by detectives in his hospital bed, Miller refused to name his assailant.

Detectives attributed the beatings and shootings to a war between independent bookies and the Los Angeles Syndicate over the racing wire service. Trans-America, without Siegel's guiding hand, was in serious trouble. Income tax returns filed by Trans-America in 1946 listed losses of \$125,000.

Newspaper editorials again screamed for a cleanup of the hoodlum element. The police had nothing against Cohen they could take into court, although they harassed him constantly by picking him up for questioning. That should have told Cohen something but he was too hard-headed to see it, understand it, or realize he was in serious trouble.

The government now took a look at Cohen and his activities. They began to probe into his sources of income, expenditures, and his income tax return. For the moment, it was a keyhole glimpse.

Bugsy Siegel, meantime, had overextended himself in his

operation of the Flamingo Hotel and was in trouble with the Syndicate, whose money was invested in the hotel and casino. It was agreed that Siegel was a dismal failure as a hotel and gambling hall operator. The truth of the matter was that he was more interested in his movie star mistress, Wendy Barrie, Marie "The Body" MacDonald, the Countess Dorothy DiFrasso, and Virginia Hill, than he was in the Flamingo. The Syndicate knew this and advised him to give up the hotel. He blew his top when he was told that he was also to give up Trans-America to the Chicago mob.

Lucky Luciano, who had been deported to Italy after his release from prison, was in Havana for a meeting with the top hoods of the country. Siegel flew to Havana for a conference with Luciano who was still the boss despite the fact he was living in Italy. Luciano was courteous to Siegel but insisted that he had to give up Trans-America to the Chicago mob and to turn over the Flamingo to those of the Syndicate who had loaned him money to build it.

Siegel pleaded strongly but Luciano was adamant.

"Ben," Luciano said, "you're keeping five women, four that I know about, and

one that I don't. Virginia Hill is enough to break a dozen millionaires. You be a good boy and do as you're told and we'll find some things for you in a different setup."

Siegel blew his top. "Who the hell do you think you're pushing around, you lousy Wop! I killed for you. I helped put you where you are. I helped make you a big shot. I need Trans-America. I am not giving it up!"

Luciano stared at Siegel with cold eyes. He didn't raise his voice when he spoke. "No more talk, Ben. No more arguments. Give up Trans-America and the Flamingo. That's it."

"You go to hell!" Siegel stormed, kicked the door before he opened it, and slammed it shut.

A SHORT time later, on June 20, 1947, Siegel was in Los Angeles, at the Moorish mansion at 810 Linden Drive in Beverly Hills where kept Virginia Hill. Allen Smiley, a close pal, was with him. Smiley sat on a divan in the living room whose windows faced a garden. Siegel came down from the upstairs rooms, settled himself on the divan alongside Smiley, picked up a newspaper.

At that instant a shot rang out and shattered the window, and then more shots split the

quiet of the night. Smiley dived for the floor at the sound of the first shot. Siegel had been hit in the face, over his left eye, in the chest, belly, and groin. The blood poured out of him in streams. He was very dead.

At that precise moment, either coincidentally or by the most exquisite timing ever employed in an underworld execution, four men walked into the manager's office of the Flamingo.

"Move out," Little Moe Sedway, one of the four men and a former pal of Siegel's, said. "We're taking over."

Mickey Cohen and Jack Dragna were picked up for questioning but it was just routine, although the police believed that Cohen may have been either the triggerman or the man who had set up Siegel for the kill. Nothing came of the investigation.

With Siegel dead, Cohen pushed his way to the top of the West Coast rackets, shoving Dragna out of the way despite Dragna's connections with the National Combine. Repercussions were swift.

On Christmas Day, 1947, a package of dynamite was found on the steps of Cohen's Beverly Hills home, a veritable fortress that Cohen had wired up with all sorts of alarms and detectors. Something had gone

wrong with the mechanism set to explode the dynamite. It saved Cohen's life.

Two more attempts were made to kill him in the next several weeks but again Cohen escaped unscathed. By 1948, he was the kingpin of the West Coast rackets with an organization of hoods equal to any in New York. He rode around in a special \$16,000 bullet-proof Cadillac, moved into a new \$150,000 home, blossomed out with a wardrobe of seventy-five suits and seventy-five pairs of shoes, drawers full of handmade shirts and silk underwear. But he was still a bum and his attempts to get into movie society failed. He did manage to attract some starlets and models and he played around with them in Hollywood's famed Strip joints while LaVonne sat home, faithful to the end.

Among Cohen's girl-friends were Liz Renay, a Hollywood glamor gal, and Candy Barr, a stripper. Candy wound up in a Texas pen for possession of marijuana, and Liz Renay paid for her friendship with Cohen by a conviction for perjury. Cohen blackened everything and everyone he touched.

As one of his fronts for his illegal operations, Cohen opened up a swank haberdashery on Holloway Drive and Sunset Boulevard. On August 18,

1948, two men walked into the haberdashery and shot the place up. Harry "Hooky" Rothman was killed instantly, and Albert "Slick" Snyder, another Cohen mobster, was wounded in the shoulder. Big Jimmy Rist, the third Cohen hood in the store, was nicked in the ear.

Cohen, who had a habit of washing his hands innumerable times a day, was in the washroom at the time and escaped being wounded or killed. Questioned by detectives, neither Snyder, Rist, or Cohen could name the men who had done the shooting.

Two hotshot Mafia triggermen, Tony Trombino and Tony Brancato, were picked up on stoolie information and questioned about the shooting and killing. They had arrived in town from Kansas City only a few days earlier. Both had alibis and the police had to release them. Snyder and Rist refused to identify them. Cohen knew now that his number was up and that there would be further attempts to kill him. He took great precautions wherever he went, two or three bodyguards always with him.

On May 18, 1949, Cohen was driving home in his Cadillac. A car drove alongside. A sub-machine gun was pushed through one of the windows. Slugs rained on the windows of

the Caddy. The only thing that saved Cohen was the bullet-proof glass.

A month later, on June 22, one of Cohen's trusted lieutenants, Neddie Herbert, was entering his West Los Angeles apartment when two gunmen took eleven shots at him with a .45 pistol and a .38 automatic. Herbert dropped to the floor and escaped unhurt. This was only a prelude to what was to come. Cohen had stepped out of line against the Syndicate, and the penalty was death. But Cohen had a charmed life.

On July 20, scarcely a month after the attempt on Herbert's life, Mickey Cohen, Neddie Herbert, Dee David, an attractive brunette starlet, and Special Agent Harry Cooper of the attorney general's office who had been assigned to guard Cohen because of the threats on his life, and because the attorney general wanted the hoods responsible for the shootings, were coming out of the fashionable Sherry's Restaurant on the Sunset Strip. It was two o'clock in the morning. As the quartet came out, a barrage of gunfire exploded from across the street.

Neddie Herbert was fatally wounded. Cohen again escaped with his life. He was wounded slightly.

The two killers who had done the shooting leaped into a



LUCKY LUCIANO

gray sedan and sped away. No one could give a description of what actually had occurred other than the fact that the shots came from across the street.

Homicide detectives believed that either Jack Dragna or the Chicago or New York Syndicate had ordered the killings. Tony Brancato and Tony Trombino were picked up for questioning but as usual the two had alibis and the police were forced to release them.

Violent troubles continued to beset Cohen. On August 22, a dynamite bomb exploded in the doorway of a house across the street from Cohen's residence. The bomb was intended

for Cohen but the stupid hood who planted it mistook that house for Cohen's.

Happy Meltzer, a Cohen gangster, was arrested in New Jersey on suspicion of the ice-pick murder of Charlie Yanowsky who had talked to Cohen shortly before he was murdered.

Cohen was taken into custody and questioned about the murder. He denied any knowledge of it. The grapevine said he was in it neck deep. It was rumor only. Inadmissible as evidence. Happy Meltzer easily beat the rap.

Shortly after, Frankie Niccoli, a Cohen hood, disappeared. His body hasn't been found to this day.

On October 10, Little Davey Ogul, another Cohen hood, also disappeared. His body also has not been found at this writing.

On the night of February 6, 1950, thirty sticks of dynamite exploded under the master bedroom of Cohen's home. It wrecked the bedroom. Once again, Cohen escaped certain death. Luckily for him, he had decided to spend the night with LaVonne in her room across the hall.

The government now stepped in, ready to prosecute Cohen on income tax charges. The publicity Cohen had been receiving because of the shoot-

ings had brought the wrath of California's police down on his head. At this time, too, Cohen was summoned before the Kefauver Crime Investigating Committee. Cohen was forced to tell of his operations as a big-time layoff bookie, a gambler who takes the bets of other bookies who can't carry the large amounts bet on certain races.

Cohen said he was broke and had only a few hundred dollars.

"I owe money," Cohen whined. "I'm broke. I owe \$35,000 to a bank. I owe everybody."

He was interrogated thoroughly about the killings in Los Angeles. He knew nothing, he declared, about the murders of Bugsy Siegel, Paulie Gibbons, George Levinson, or Abe Davidian, a key witness in a government smuggling case. The Kefauver Committee filed away his case for further attention.

On December 11, 1950, Cohen's attorney, Samuel L. Rummel, a mouthpiece for top mobsters, was shotgunned to death outside his Laurel Canyon mansion. Tony Brancato and Tony Trombino were again picked up for questioning. Once more, however, the two gunmen had alibis and were released. The killing of Rummel shattered Cohen's equanimity. He sold out his haberdashery

and announced he was quitting the rackets for good.

That statement didn't sound good to the government. Cohen's self-affirmed reformation wasn't kidding anyone, especially the government. They had built a case against him and moved in. In April, 1951, Mickey and LaVonne Cohen were indicted by a United States Grand Jury on four counts of income tax evasion. They were charged specifically with evading payment of \$156,123 for the years 1946-48. The government charged that Cohen had an income of \$318,500 during that period but had paid taxes on only \$87,500.

The charges against LaVonne were dropped after she testified that she knew nothing of her husband's many operations, even though she had signed joint returns.

United States Attorney Ernest A. Tolin paraded a line of accountants, gamblers, bookies, and other witnesses who traced Cohen's numerous and devious financial operations. Cohen protested that he was just a businessmen who had failed in his business. The jury didn't believe him. They found him guilty on all four counts. On July 9, he was sentenced to five years in federal prison and fined \$10,000. That was the

beginning of the end for Mickey Cohen.

He was released on October 9, 1955. LaVonne had divorced him. Jack Dragna died in 1956, one of the few mobsters to die a natural death. Cohen was destined to run into more trouble because he couldn't keep his mouth shut.

Mike Wallace, famed TV reporter, decided to have Mickey Cohen on his show. Cohen appeared on the Wallace show in June 1957. Wallace, an expert and brilliant interrogator, asked Cohen about the many killings attributed to him. Cohen's answer was a classic.

"I never killed a man who didn't deserve it!"

Cohen presented himself to Mike Wallace as a man who at least had seen the light and who realized that he had trod the wrong paths, was now penitent and was seeking a way to redeem himself by conversion to Catholicism. He had sought out Evangelist Billy Graham and placed himself in the hands of "this man who is showing me the way to God." It was all pretty talk and made good copy. It wasn't, however, Mickey Cohen.

Before the interview was over, Cohen returned to himself. He attacked Los Angeles Police Chief William H. Parker, Captain James Hamilton of the

department's intelligence squad, former Mayor Fletcher Bowron and former Police Chief C. B. Horrall.

Cohen called Parker some rather nasty names, some of them considered unprintable by every newspaperman in the country, even drunken ones. The performance was certainly a new high in weird interviews.

Cohen had an axe to grind with Chief William H. Parker and Mayor Bowron. It went back almost ten years from the date when he appeared on the Mike Wallace interview. He had made the same kind of remarks to those he made on the Wallace show to his henchmen. The words were stronger, however. The remarks referred to deals and payoffs involving Brenda Allen, infamous madame and vice queen of Los Angeles.

IN APRIL, 1949, there appeared a piece in the *Hollywood Nite Life* signed by Jimmie Tarantino which ignited the fuse that ultimately blew the lid off the vice racket in Los Angeles. The article stated:

"The Los Angeles Grand Jury can ask Mayor Fletcher T. Bowron many embarrassing questions regarding many shady deals with His Honor's Administrative Vice Department.

"We have about twenty-five questions we would like an-

swered. And so would the public. The puzzle involves Lieutenant Rudy Wellpott and Sergeant Elmer V. Jackson.

"Last week we told you of the alleged shakedown between Lieutenant Wellpott and Mickey Cohen. We also pointed out that Lieutenant Wellpott and Mickey Cohen had been chummy at various public places.

"Now, we would like to ask Mayor Bowron to answer the following questions, of which we are certain he is capable of doing.

"What does Jim Vauss, the wire-tapper, know about the intimate conversations which often took place between Sergeant Jackson and Brenda Allen, well known prostitute now serving sentences of 180 days?

"What does Mayor Bowron know about Sergeant Stokes' connections with wire-tapper Jim Vauss? And what happened to the wire-recordings?"

Jim Vauss had done some work for Mickey Cohen, had wired his home and put in about \$4,000 worth of radar and electronics stuff. He had also done other work for him, made recordings of conversations between Brenda Allen and Sergeant E. V. Jackson.

In Florable Muir's column in the Los Angeles Mirror on May

6, the noted columnist wrote:

"I hear that those wire recordings to be offered in the trial of Harold (Happy) Meltzer were sold to Mickey Cohen by the gent who made them for the Hollywood police vice squad.

"They're supposed to be a conversation picked up between Brenda Allen and a cop.

"Brenda, who was recently convicted on a charge of purveying illicit love, was hotter than a depot stove because the protection she said she had been paying for wasn't forthcoming.

"If the wire recordings get into the testimony a lot of other people are going to be hotter than Brenda was."

The Syndicate now took a firm look at Mickey Cohen and was highly displeased. Internecine warfare was bad enough but fighting the cops as Cohen was doing, openly, in defiance of all the rules, was certain to bring the wrath of the press and public down on all the underworld. Cohen was ordered to quiet down but he was too big, in his own mind, to take orders. The determination to silence him, once and for all, one way or another, was then made by the mob.

A month after Florabel Muir's column of May 6, appeared she wrote another col-

umn, this one on June 8, in which she declared:

"United States District Attorney James Carter says he's investigating the possibility that Federal telephones have been tapped and if he learns they have he'll take the matter up with the Federal Grand Jury today.

"Why does he have to wait for government phones to be tapped? It's just as much against the law to tap anybody's phone.

"I've heard lots of citizens discussing the wire-tapping goings on recently and their reactions are interesting.

"Some of them think it is okay for the police to tap wires to get evidence on suspected criminals.

"But if you ask them how they'd like to have anyone listening in on their own private phone chats, that's an equine of a different shade.

"The story of Sergeant Charles Stoker of LAPD is very interesting to me because it reveals the way of thinking that seems to be predominant among some young cops today. They have lots of zeal, but not much know-how. Stoker says he heard that Brenda Allen was operating as a madam and the only way he knew how to get her was by listening in on her telephone calls. So he asked a

gent named Jimmy Vauss who just happened to be riding around in his car with him to put a bug on her phone. He doesn't explain how he happened to be riding around with Jimmy (Sleight-of-hand) Vauss.

"Jimmy, who always seems to have been ready for any exigency, whips out his electronic tools and presto they're getting an earful of Brenda's talk with a Mr. Doe in the police department."

When Harry "Happy" Meltzer went on trial, Sam Rummel, Meltzer's lawyer, made an opening statement to the jury in which he declared that Lieutenant Wellpott and Sergeant Jackson had attempted to obtain \$5,000 from Mickey Cohen to be used in the campaign of Mayor Bowron.

Rummel said, "We will prove through testimony that the two men first sought \$20,000, then \$10,000, and finally \$5,000 from Cohen in return for their promise to quit harrassing him."

This was the first direct accusation against police officers made by an attorney representing a henchman of Cohen's, and it had to stand that it was an accusation made by Cohen himself.

Rummel said further, and this portion of his opening statement to the jury had to be

taken with a grain of salt, that:

"We will further show that Cohen told him, Lieutenant Rudy Wellpott, and Sergeant E. V. Jackson, he was a legitimate businessman and refused to be roused further and charged that even if he gave the \$5,000 he was sure none of it would ever reach Mayor Bowron. We will prove that Wellpott and Jackson took their lady friends on tours of such places as the House of Murphy; Slapsy Maxie's, and other Hollywood night spots and told the management to 'send the check to Mickey Cohen.' We will have witnesses from each of these spots to so testify."

Mayor Bowron issued a statement after the newspapers hit the street. He was indignant over the charges made by Sam Rummel.

"I know nothing whatever of the facts," Mayor Bowron said. "I never heard of the matter before, directly or indirectly. If there is anything at all to the statement by Sam Rummel, attorney for Mickey Cohen and his gang of hoodlums, I ask who is the accessory after the fact in not revealing the information to the District Attorney at the time of the happening rather than waiting until three weeks before the city election?"

"Assuredly, this will make clear to the public mind in

whose corner Mickey Cohen is and to what length he and his ilk will go in their effort to break into Los Angeles. This will provide another chapter for the State Crime Commission's report."

A police officer named Arthur Logue was the first witness called by District Attorney William G. Russell.

Logue had been a member of the administrative vice squad for two and a half years and at approximately midnight on January 15, in company with Lieutenant Wellpott and Sergeant Jackson, he drove to a spot across from Cohen's haberdashery in the 8800 block on Sunset Blvd. There the men were met by two other police officers, Gene James and A. L. James. The five men kept Cohen's store under observation for an hour and a half. At that time five men came out and left in two Cadillacs. Logue said the five officers trailed the first Cadillac, which contained Mickey Cohen, Harry Meltzer and the driver, Dave Ogul.

"We trailed it for nearly two miles," Logue said on direct examination. "We were in between the two Cadillacs and the rear Cadillac continually blew its horn in an apparent attempt to attract the attention of Cohen. They tried to pass us but we didn't let them."

Officer Logue said they finally halted both Cadillacs at the corner of Santa Monica Boulevard and Ogden Drive. He testified that he rushed to the rear right door of the first Cadillac, jerked it open and saw Harry Meltzer sitting in the rear seat with a gun almost completely hidden in both hands.

"I started to raise my gun," Logue said from the witness stand, "and then Meltzer dropped his gun and opened his hands. I reached in, picked up the gun, put it in my pocket and told Meltzer to get out of the car. I searched Meltzer and Cohen and then made a thorough inspection of the Cadillac. I then placed Meltzer in the police car and after other routine questioning of the five men we drove off with Meltzer."

These were the facts of the Meltzer case, and the reason why Cohen began his hate of Police Chief Parker and Mayor Bowron. Cohen wanted to help Meltzer. He used veiled threats against the officers in the case, telling them he had recordings of conversations between them and Brenda Allen. In order to make good he offered Jim Vauss a deal for the Allen recording.

In the sum-up of Mickey's career, lurid, violent, there was an aftermath. Tony Brancato and Tony Trombino, the two

Mafia gunmen, were shot down on the streets of Los Angeles. Who killed Attorney Sam Rummel, and why, is anybody's guess, but it pointed to Brancato and Trombino. Most of Cohen's hoods deserted him, including Joe Sica. He was mixed up in the Lana Turner affair when the actress' daughter, Cheryl, knifed Johnny Stompanto fatally.

Cohen demanded all sorts of investigations of the killing because Johnny Stompanto was a pal of his. He got more bad publicity. He tried to kill Paul Caruso, a prominent Los Angeles attorney, who had handled many civil matters for him. There were legal fees in the amount of \$8,000. Caruso asked for payment and Cohen told him to try and get it.

Caruso drove to a nursery that Cohen was then operating. Cohen pulled a gun. Caruso grabbed Lillian, Cohen's sister, who standing beside him, held

her in front of him, and backed slowly out of the South Vermont store, leaped into his car and drove away.

The government got after Cohen again for various tax matters and put him away for another ten years. He is still in prison. He is due to be released shortly. He may decide to pick up where he left off. If he does, he will find himself in serious trouble not only with the police but with the underworld. Neither wants any part of him, for obvious reasons. He became accustomed to the big buck, a fancy home, big cars, fancy wardrobe, and a spotlight whose glare he fancied despite the fact it burned him to a crisp. But that's Mickey Cohen. He probably doesn't mind a prison cell so long as everyone will recognize him as a big-shot. Was he a big-shot? He'll be one, in his own mind until he dies. And that could be sooner than you think.

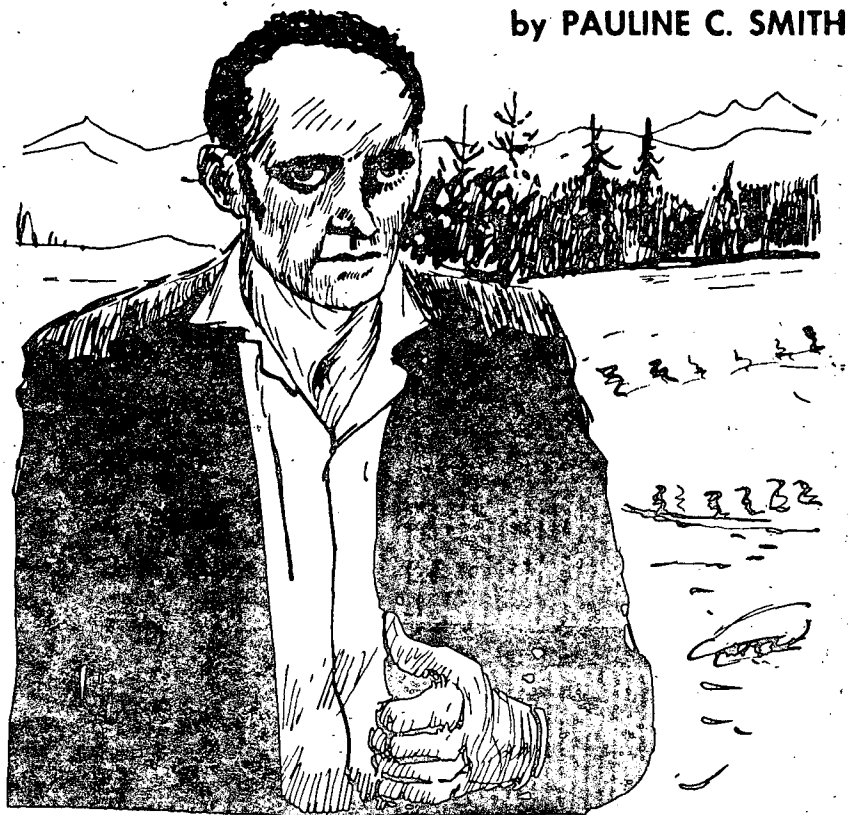
COMING SOON: in the OCTOBER issue.

Another TRUE CRIME STORY Masterpiece

WALTER "THE WAITER" RICCA

by DAVID MAZROFF

by PAULINE C. SMITH



Planting Time

*He was my all, the one thing I had, my life. But—I
knew someday he'd be the death of me...*

IT WAS real peaceful when Ben wasn't around, so quiet a man could set and doze once in a while if he was a mind to. Floyd Holladay tipped his chair back against the weatherbeaten front of the house and gazed out over parched fields. When he squinted, letting the sun beads flicker through his narrowed vision, the young orchard beyond looked like it

might have forty little saplings instead of only half that number.

The day was like a blanket, soiled and folded double as the breeze stirred up breathless, woolen fluffs of dust from the cracked ground.

This rushing the season was enough to give a man spring fever. Floyd stretched his legs so that the edge of bright light just reached the tips of his dusty work shoes.

He yawned, letting the luxury of inertia rest upon him, and bent his arms to clasp his hands behind his head.

The darker blue moons had long since dried on the faded blue of his shirt.

This kind of day, with the feel of summer close by and the frost hardly out of the ground, a man wanted to warm his winter-tight body in the flannel air and fold back his ear to the plaintive note of the meadow lark. A man just kind of wanted to rest a day like this, and let the heat sneak into him.

If his brother were here now, things would be different.

Floyd jerked upright. The front legs of his chair struck the porch floor.

He snapped his eyes wide. His startled glance scuttled from the half-planted orchard to the highway.

All he could see was the dry

grass of last year's crop and the glisten of a few brown, stubborn leaves that still clung to the horny branches of the road trees.

He tried to settle back again, stretching out one foot to the sun's edge, rocking on the two legs of his chair, nervously moving a finger in half-time to the grace notes of the meadow lark.

Ben probably wouldn't be back for a couple of days yet. Maybe three. Gradually, Floyd thought himself back into sluggishness as the monotonous drone of newly-hatched insects rode the lazy breeze and came whispering to him like a sleepy breath.

This was the life. Sprawled in the shade of the porch. Letting the buzz of the bees tickle his eardrums and the warmth of the air brush his cheek.

Contentedly, he squinted his eyes at the twenty slender saplings.

Then he heard something.

He rapped his chair to sharp attention. Staring past the half-completed orchard to the curve of the road, he hunched in rigid vigilance.

There it was again.

The panting chug of an overheated motor.

Now a swirl of dust.

Floyd leaped from the porch, disregarding the steps.

He sprinted an erratic trail over the dry clay of the yard. Frantically his eyes searched the ground as he ran.

He failed to find the pick or the shovel.

Then he reached the pump and there they were, leaning against the pump handle. He grabbed up the tools just as the truck clanked into the yard and braked with a final explosion.

Floyd looked up at the dusty face of his brother, and into the eyes regarding him bleakly.

"Surprised to see you so soon, Ben," he said with strained heartiness. "Didn't hardly expect you back 'til tomorrow, or maybe the day after." He ran his sleeve over his mouth. "Just come up to the house for a drink. Hot work."

He jerked his head toward the tools clutched in his hand.

Ben's eyes continued to survey him steadily from the high seat of the truck.

"Must have got your business done pretty fast, huh?"

"No," said Ben deliberately. "Took me a week. Like I told you it would before I left. It'd take me a week to put through the loan, and it'd take you a week to put in the orchard."

Stiffly, Ben turned on the seat and set his foot on the running board. "A week ago today I left. You never did have any

sense about time, Floyd. Always was two or three days behind." He stepped down onto the hard clay. "Just like you're behind on the orchard."

"Now don't start in on me, Ben," whined Floyd, following him toward the house.

The screen door slammed in his face.

Hitching the tools up under his arm, Floyd pushed through the door and stepped into the kitchen.

"That's slow work out there in the orchard, diggin' all them holes. The ground's like rock when it's dry."

Ben hung his hat on the hook and splashed tepid water from a tin pan onto his dusty face. He rubbed off the grime on the roller towel. Half turning to look at his brother over the gray folds of cloth, he said, "You forgot you was carrying them things. Why didn't you set 'em down?"

With elaborate care, Floyd leaned, first the shovel and then the pick against a kitchen chair.

"It's awful hot," he complained. "Slows a man down when it's hot like this so early in the year. A man's blood's gotta get used to the change."

"Your blood runs slow no matter what the weather is," Ben snapped. He reached into the icebox. "Didn't get no ice, either."

Cutting off six thick slices of bacon, he laid them into the frying pan on the stove. Then he picked up a beer bottle of gasoline and poured a short, steady stream into the chamber under the generator. Reaching into his pocket, he plucked out two matches. One he laid on the edge of the stove, the other he scratched into a blaze on the seat of his pants. Leaning over, he sternly lit the gasoline and straightened up to wait.

"You always do a job by halves." Ben took the other match and lit it, holding it down to the burner. The hiss was followed by the slow crackle of bacon grease. "left that bare-root stock out in the sun, too. All dried out by now."

Ben stepped into the pantry and came out carrying four dirty eggs in his big hands. He laid all but one of them in a line by the stove. Holding the egg above the frying pan, he stuck his two thumb nails through the shell and let the round yellow and the glutinous white drop into the pan. It sizzled. After he broke each egg, he tossed its shell into the exact center of the cardboard carton under the stove.

He stood over the pan with the pancake turner.

"You should've finished that orchard by now," he said.

"There's a storm coming up. Nothing like a soaking rain for a new set orchard."

Deftly, he turned the eggs over.

"There ain't no storm comin'," Floyd protested. "It won't rain for a long time. Probably not until next month."

Ben gave him a grazing look of contempt before he went back to the eggs. "Didn't you feel that breeze? It's from the north. There's a funny cast in the sky too. Be pouring inside of three hours."

Ben took two plates from the pantry. Carefully, he sliced the eggs and bacon in half with the pancake turner and filled the plates. He set them on the table. He brought out the milk, the knives and the forks.

"Set," he said abruptly.

Floyd tipped the handles of the tools away from the chair. He sat down and let the handles rest again in the chair back. He held his fork in one hand and his knife in the other. "You can't be sure about it, Ben. The wind might change any minute now."

Ben chewed and swallowed. He shook his head. "Won't change," he said decisively. "That wind'll bring up a storm for sure. See? It's getting dark already."

Floyd turned to look out the

window. "It's just gettin' dark natural. Twilight."

"Too early." Ben ate stolidly, his words muffled. "You never got a job done in your life." Reaching into his pocket for a handkerchief, he wiped the egg from his mouth. His eyes looked coldly at his brother. "Sometimes I wish you was a million miles away. I'd get along better." He started to rise from the table. "Had a hard time getting that loan because of you."

Floyd heard the words drop into his brain and felt the creep of humid air curl from his neck on up to his forehead. He laid down his knife and fork. The breeze, passing through the window, was heavy with warmth.

Ben stood and pushed his chair precisely up against the table. "Had to promise I'd see you kept busy so the farm would produce."

Turning, he stepped away. "Will too. If I have to harness you to the plow."

The threat and the heat swirled around Floyd's head like smoke. He rose heavily to his feet. Supporting himself against the back of the chair, he felt the pick handle press deeply into his leg. He looked down at it as if it were a foreign word he couldn't understand. The smell of bacon grease seeped into his half-open mouth and



plugged up his throat. A dust-freighted gust of wind swirled through the window and coated his nostrils.

His hand dropped down upon the pick handle. His fingers curved upon the sympathetic wood.

Ben turned his back and stooped to gaze out the kitchen window.

"Some day," he said with his hard, dry laugh, "you'll start a job you'll wish you finished..."

With one sluggish motion, Floyd tightened his hands around the handle and moved forward. He raised the pick in a slow curving arc. It wavered high and dropped slowly through the hot, heavy air.

Floyd staggered with the weight.

The greasy smell was like a veil in the room. The breeze ruffled it to stifling folds. . .

With a whistling sigh, Ben crumpled.

"Ben," quavered Floyd. "Ben."

He backed off and clutched the chair for support. The pick handle clattered to the pine boards of the floor.

"Ben."

Floyd stared down unbelievably at the still, spread-out body. He retreated from it, stumoling over the feet. "Ben."

Outside, the meadow larks scolded their way to bed. The insect drone turned mournful. A breeze sighed through the window, puffing the torn paper shade, then settling it again with a slap.

"Ben." As Floyd watched, he swayed, his mouth sagging loose. His feet shuffled and the shovel dropped with a thud and a clang. Floyd jerked, jaws quivering. The sound propelled his mind into slow action.

He had to get outside.

He had to dig a place for Ben. His muscles ached as he bent over for the shovel. Funny how his muscles ached when Ben hadn't been here to tongue-lash him to work.

He let the screen door slide softly closed behind him. Now

the light was dim and the clouds overhead jostled each other. Sure was a storm comin', just like Ben said.

Out by the oak tree he started to dig, the ground chipping off in flakes under the blade of his shovel. There was a smell in the air of approaching rain and the bare branches rubbed together like dry old fingers.

He really should have the pick to get through this cement-like clay. Dropping the shovel, he started toward the house for it. Then he remembered, stopped short and lumbered back.

The meadow lark scold had muted to a sleepy complaint. The insect whirr was gone. Floyd hacked at the clay with the dull blade. It gave forth a harsh and stony sound.

After he'd chipped off a two-inch layer, he changed his mind.

By the pump, a stream of intermittent water had made a groove in the bank. It should be softer there. Easy digging.

With tottering steps, Floyd reached it.

A soft rumble drummed the sky and the clouds parted to let the light through for an instant. The pump reminded him he was thirsty. He worked the handle and brought forth a thin trickle. Leaning over, he let the water drop into his mouth. It was

warm and made the weight in his stomach rise to his throat. He spat it out.

With the edge of his blade, he marked the slender crevice formed by the stream and again leaned on his shovel.

It was damp only a short distance down. From the crease in the ground, the clay broke away in scanty bites.

The heavy air now turned clammy with promise. Floyd felt perspiration ooze from his armpits on down his sides and spread along the top of his pants. It broke out in a sparse sprinkle upon his forehead. The rising wind dried him off in humid gusts.

He felt as if he'd been at this job for hours—days, even. In the lowering darkness, he knelt down to finger the earth and discovered he had made a hole only large enough to plant a young bare-root fruit tree.

Bent over the shallow pit, he felt tears form and squeeze forth. He closed his eyes tight and pressed his lips together, a great pity for himself a hard knot in his throat.

He wished he hadn't done that to Ben. Ben could have told him how to dig this hole. Ben always told him how to do things.

In his confusion, the brewing storm pressed down with a great loneliness.

He rose from his knees and moaned to his feet. He hobbled toward the dark outline of the truck. He'd have to tell 'em in town. He'd have to tell 'em he couldn't finish that there hole. He'd have to let 'em know about Ben.

"Floyd."

He whirled, staring through the uncertain night. Then he saw it, the shadow coming toward him. Quick and sharp.

"Floyd," came the voice and the harsh, dry laugh.

Floyd backed off, his arms spread out behind him. A roll of thunder broke forth. A drop of rain spattered his face. It was rainin', like Ben said it would.

He retreated, stumbling, his eyes upon the advancing shadow.

"I told you you'd start a job sometime you wished you'd finished. This is it, Floyd."

The meadow larks fluttered their wings and scampered through the grass. One whistled in frightened wakefulness.

Floyd's steps stuttered again. He jerked himself upright, backing over the rough ground.

"Never did finish anything, did you?" came the voice. "But I do, Floyd. I always finish what I start."

The shadow was coming faster now.

The drops came down thicker.

A Novelet of Strange Terror



WHITE SHEEP

I came, at long last, to my ancestral home. I found there horror, vice, incredible evil. And one feeble old lady, who had guessed my secret. . .

by THEODORE MATHIESON



THE COST of my bus ticket from Portland to San Francisco left exactly fifty cents in my pocket, and this I spent on two bags of peanuts and a bar of chocolate, which I washed down with the free ice water in the coach.

When I got off the bus at the S.F. terminal, I walked through the shed, just as if I had a destination, too, like everybody else. But then I sat down in the waiting room, with my battered brown suitcase at my side, and considered my problem. I was fresh out of college, without much working experience, flat broke, and homeless.

Through the waiting room

windows I could see across Fifth Street to the dingy store fronts, where, presently, seeing the wire-grated glass of a hock shop, I began wrestling with some sentiment.

The pawnbroker fingered my watch, the one Aunt Kate had given me for Christmas in my sophomore year at O.S.C., with the air of a supercilious Jeeves.

"Certainly not more than twelve-fifty," he said.

"My aunt paid a hundred for it!"

"The case is rather badly dented, as you can see." During my last year in college, when I edited the campus daily, I used to sit at the typewriter groping

for ideas and whang the case against the base of the machine.

"Okay," I said, and the pawnbroker gave me the money and a ticket.

I went to a cafeteria around the corner on Market Street and filled up on two orders of turkey sandwiches and three cups of coffee and a bear claw. Then I sat back, lit up my curved-stem pipe, and studied my problem from a more objective point of view.

Aunt Kate, poor dear, would never have approved of my coming to San Francisco, nor would she have been fooled by my saying there were more opportunities for newspaper jobs in California.

"You really came down to see what Edwin could do for you, didn't you, Dan?" she would say, horrified. "But you mustn't go to him. Stay away from Edwin. Do for yourself. For the good of your soul, Dan!"

"That's Portland prejudice, Aunt Kate," I thought.

It was getting night outside, and I was alone in a strange city, and the cure for the growing coldness in my heart was only twenty feet away, in a telephone booth.

A woman answered first, with an exciting, husky voice, and when I asked for Edwin, she told me to wait.

"Edwin?" I asked, when a man's voice answered. "This is Dan."

"Dan who?"

"Dan Gentry. Your stepson. From Portland."

"Oh, Dan!" The warmth in his voice made the city stop being strange and cold. Are you in town? Never mind, I know where that cafeteria is. I'll come right down and get you. No trouble at all. Just stay where you are, boy!"

I went out on the sidewalk then, and enjoyed watching the city lights grow brighter as the evening darkened.

I felt fine. Edwin must have connections in this city. Maybe he could even get me on a newspaper. It felt good to have somebody interested in me again. Since Aunt Kate's death, in the middle of my senior year, the world had turned pretty indifferent. Especially after the money ran out.

A tall girl in a red coat went by, giving me an invitational jiggle and glance.

"Sorry, honey, I'm waiting for somebody," I said. I always like to be tactful.

In a few minutes a long, yellow Cadillac drove up with a chauffeur at the wheel and Edwin jumped out of the back seat and seized me by both hands.

"Dan! My God how you've

grown, son. You're six feet, I'll bet!"

"Six-one."

"A little thin, but we'll fix that! Come on, son, get in."

He put my suitcase inside and we climbed after it, and the car started up Market Street.

Edwin swung around in the seat to get a better look at me in the passing lights, while I studied him. I didn't know if he'd changed much, since I hadn't seen him in fifteen years, and my early impressions were rather dim. He was lean, a little above middle height, with tight, durable features and a thin-lipped mouth—amazingly young-looking for a man who must be close to fifty. His hair was raven-black, and I wondered if he dyed it.

"You look very much like your mother," he said. "Too bad she isn't alive to see you now. She'd be proud of you. College man, eh? What field?"

"Journalism."

"Good for you!"

"I try my hand at short stories, too. But right now I think newspaper experience would be valuable."

"Well, well. We'll have to see what we can find for you. Sorry to hear of Kate's death in that automobile accident. I read about it. I wrote you, you know—"

"I know," I said, embar-



rassed. Edwin had written me at least once a year as long as I could remember, and never once had I answered. Kate had forbidden it.

"Didn't Kate leave you anything?" he asked, and I thought his eyes turned sharply probing.

"No, but then I didn't expect her to. She had a grown son and daughter of her own, and besides, I thought I had a newspaper job all lined up in Portland after I graduated. But it blew up."

"Well, I'm glad it did," Edwin said, slapping me on the knee. "Because then you thought of me, and I've always been ready to help you. No, sir, Dan, there's nothing like having a family to back you up!"

IT TOOK me a while to get to sleep that night, even though Edwin had given me a large, comfortable room overlooking a pleasant garden, with the ocean murmuring not far away.

I still hadn't recovered from the awe I felt at the sight of Edwin's manor-sized house, set amid acres of greenery, and my first meeting with the "family," all of whom lived here in the big house with Edwin, and had done nothing to make me feel I was welcome.

"Will you be staying long?" Edwin's daughter, Linda, had drawled when Edwin brought me into the library to meet them. She was a slim, well-molded blonde, doubtless she of the sexy voice on the phone.

"He's come to join the family, Linda," Edwin said pointedly, as he warmed himself before the big fireplace.

Linda looked me over coolly, then turned and laid her hand on the arm of her brother, Fred.

"Maybe he can help you in the studio," she said.

Fred, small and dark like his father, and sporting a Hitler-type moustache, gave me a fishy look.

"What do you do for a living?" he asked.

"He writes for a newspaper. We'll find something to suit his talents."

I could see Edwin was angry, even though he winked at me. "You see, Dan, we're a very talented family, and we've all found outlets. Linda is a model, Fred is a fine photographer, and Philip, at the piano there, is a musician, although he has other talents as well."

Philip Ordway, Edwin's nephew, was close to thirty, pale faced and sulky looking. He gave me a glance over the music rack that one might expect from a life-long enemy and executed an eloquent glissando. Then a gleam came into his eyes, and following his gaze, I saw a white-uniformed nurse enter the room, pushing a wheel chair in which sat an old woman.

"Ah, and here is Grandmother Owen," Edwin said. "She wouldn't remember you, Dan. She doesn't know anybody. She's over ninety now, you know."

I looked at the old woman sitting with a vacant smile, clearly senile, her hands plucking aimlessly at the white stole that matched her hair, and remembered her dimly.

She was my own grandmother on my mother's side, no blood relation to anyone else in the room. All I could recall of her though, was that she'd given me a bag of licorice candy when I was very young. Now, even

though her eyes were out of focus, they did not look away like the others as I smiled.

Suddenly a book which the old woman held loosely in her lap, slid with a thump to the floor, and as the nurse and I bent over to pick up the volume, our heads touched. I was aware of shining chestnut hair tucked neatly under a nurse's cap, cool green eyes and a piquant, alert face.

"You've just bumped into Miss Fox," Edwin said laughing. "She lives with us, and takes care of Grandmother. Miss Fox, my stepson, Dan."

She smiled, and her friendly eyes warmed me hugely. The book the old lady had dropped was still open in my hands, revealing a signature written on one of the end papers—*Maud Owen*.

The next moment, Edwin took the book from me and put it back into the old woman's lap.

"Maud never lets go of that book," Edwin said. "It contains reproductions of the paintings of Grandma Moses. She was absorbed in the work of Grandma Moses when she began to lose contact. That book seems to be the only object she's clearly aware of."

"I often think she's painting pictures in her mind," Miss Fox said, and I thought her speech

fitted her—gentle, feminine, and clearly articulated.

"Maybe she's not robbed of self-expression at that," Edwin said. "She used to like to write, you know. Poems and things like that!"

Philip Ordway sounded a chord, as if to attract attention, and I saw he was watching Miss Fox, his face grinning like Pan, an open, libidinous gleam in his eyes.

Then Edwin clapped his hand on my shoulder.

"We want to make you feel welcome here, Dan. In time, we want you to become one of us!"

But listening to the pulsing surf now, I wasn't sure I wanted to be one of them. I knew that Linda, Fred, and Philip didn't want me to be.

I must have dozed. A clock in the hall below chimed three, and then I heard the creak of the floorboard outside my door.

I slipped out of bed and tip-toed to the door, where I stood listening. Then I swung the door open as I flicked on the switch. The hall was empty, but from somewhere I heard the click of a latch.

The note was on the floor inside my threshold. It was folded and the message was block-printed in pencil on a piece of lined paper. It said:

Leave this house—don't tell them where you've gone—for your own safety do this at once!

For a moment I got panicky. Then I took myself in hand and counted my money. I had a little over ten dollars, and I asked myself where I would go, what I would do.

And after thinking about it awhile, I got back into bed and tried to go to sleep again.

THE NEXT morning I had breakfast with Edwin and his nephew, Philip Ordway, in the big paneled dining room.

"My own youngsters like to sleep late," Edwin said as he cracked his boiled egg. "Phil, here, of course, works with me at the office, and he has to get up."

In the morning light, Edwin did not look as young as he had the night before. His hair was just as black, but his skin looked pouchy, and his eyes had that glazed, jellified look that one associates with over-indulgence.

"I spend the greater part of the day downtown," he said, "but I want you to feel free to go and come as you please. I'll give you a key."

"What is your work, Edwin?" I asked.

There was a little noise on

my left, and Philip's egg cup went rolling across the linen tablecloth, the egg with it, leaving a thin trail of yellow yolk.

"Damn it," Phil said, his pale face turning paler. "My knife slipped."

The look of disgust in Edwin's face as he glanced at his nephew set me talking to cover up the breach.

"Aunt Kate was never specific about what you did, except to say you were pretty well-to-do."

I looked appreciatively around the luxurious dining room, the windows of which looked out on a sunken garden.

Edwin chuckled. "I'm just a merchant, Dan. I have outlets—in all major cities in the far west, and at the moment I'm considering expansion to the east. Phil is working on that plan now, aren't you, Phil?" There was a goading malice in Edwin's tone.

Phil's face got red again. He nodded, his mouth full of toast, and favored me with his vendetta-look.

"Phil, I'm sure you've noticed, lacks a certain amount of charm," Edwin went on. "But up to now he's been reasonably efficient. Now I must leave you, Dan, but tonight you and I will go out on the town, and I'll show you a

San Francisco that'll make you wonder why you wasted your years in Portland." He slapped my shoulder and put down a fifty dollar bill in front of me. "For expenses, in case you want to wander."

"But I can't—"

"Go ahead! If your stepfather can't give you a little present, who can?"

When he and Phil had gone I stared down at the fifty, still wondering how he'd earned it. Then I put the bill in my wallet and went out on the terrace that overlooked a lovely formal garden. On the far edge was a high, redwood-stake fence and beyond that, sand dunes, shining yellow against a misty blue sky.

Down near the end of the garden I could see Grandmother Owen sitting in her wheelchair, with Miss Fox beside her, on a bench. I went down to them.

As I appeared, my grandmother, looking fragile in a blue print dress, opened her eyes sleepily without focussing them, and then closed them again. Miss Fox gave me a friendly smile.

"Would it disturb her if I spoke to you?" I asked.

"I don't think so. She's pretty much like a three-year-old child, you know. She smiles at everyone, and everyone's her friend."

"She must demand a good deal of care."

"She requires it, yes, but she doesn't demand it. That makes it easier."

I sat down beside Miss Fox and looked at the old lady's hand lying relaxed on the arm of the wheelchair. It was remarkably unwrinkled for one so old, delicately tapered, with almond-shaped nails. There were dark, possibly medicinal, stains upon her fingertips.

I felt a sudden sadness, for her hands were exactly like Aunt Kate's. On impulse, I took her hand in one of mine, while with the other I took the note out of my pocket and held it out to the nurse.

"Did you write this, Miss Fox?"

She read the note and I could see a deep flush spread over her features.

"No, I didn't write it. Why should I? Where did you get it?"

"It was slipped under my door last night. Yours was the only really friendly face I've seen here, and I couldn't imagine anyone else going to such trouble."

For a moment Miss Fox seemed to be in conflict. Then her face cleared and she laid her hand on my arm.

"I may have no right to say this, Mr. Gentry, but I think

you should follow its advice. You don't belong here."

"Why?"

"You mustn't ask me that. I'm not acting very—professional."

She made a movement as if to rise, but I restrained her.

"Miss Fox, I need your help."

Grandmother Owen stirred in her chair and I released her hand.

"My father died when I was five," I continued. "Shortly afterwards, my mother married Mr. Gentry, who was a widower with two children of his own, Linda and Fred. I remember I didn't get along very well with them. When I was seven, I developed asthma and had to leave the city and go live with my mother's sister Kate. I guess mother made the thing legal, because when Edwin tried to get me back later, after my mother's death, he couldn't do it. He used to write to me for years, but Kate would never let me answer. She said he was a man it was better to have nothing to do with. Those were her words. But she never let me know anything about him. I came here because I was homeless and penniless and jobless. Mr. Gentry is my stepfather, for what it's worth. I must say he's been kind to me. But, well, I've felt uneasy

here from the first, and after I got this note—"

"I see." Miss Fox's voice was sympathetic. "I've only been here a month myself, Mr. Gentry, and all I can say is that I feel there is something wrong here. I can't say what it is. Everybody's very nice, but there's something in the air, in every seemingly conventional remark. When I saw you last night, I knew you weren't part of it. And somehow, I know you mustn't let yourself become part of it!"

"Thanks. It's nice to know you've thought that much about me, Miss—I can't go on calling you Miss Fox when I feel so grateful and friendly towards you!"

"Felicia," she said smiling.

"And please call me Dan. I'm going to keep an eye out for you while I'm here, anyway."

"Oh, I'm in no danger!" Felicia said with a laugh.

I HAD TO admit Edwin was a fine host that night as we hit the high spots. Linda came along, too, breathtaking in a low-cut lame dress, and apparently she had had a change of heart about me. She took my arm and snuggled up possessively, and halfway through the evening, when I had enough to drink to make me sociable, and

we were pressed in a close embrace on the dance floor, I told her how glad I was that, although she was my stepsister, we weren't really blood relations at all.

That seemed to amuse her, and she threw back her handsome head and laughed until other partners on the floor looked at us. I shook her a little and she subsided and pressed me secretly, and the look in her deep blue eyes thrilled me right down to the soles of the new Florsheims that I'd bought that afternoon with the money Edwin had given me.

We rolled home around three in the morning, all of us hilarious, and as I walked up the stairs to my room, I was glad I had developed a good head for liquor at college, and hadn't disgraced myself in front of my relatives.

Inside my room there was another note on the floor that sobered me.

You are being tested. Do not succumb, or you are lost!

I took a shower and then went to bed. A little while later, while I lay still awake, there came a scratching at my door. I opened it, and Linda slipped in in a thin nightdress and put her arms around my neck.

"I'm glad we're not brother



and sister, too, Dan," she whispered in my ear.

And when she kissed me, I couldn't help giving her what she'd come for.

At the breakfast table the next morning Edwin told me, "Fred will take charge of you today. He even got up early to do it!"

Fred, too, seemed to have had a turn of heart, for he smiled at me cheerfully now, his teeth looking large beneath his Hitler-like mustache.

"You interested in photography? Fred asked.

"One year I was head photographer for the campus yearbook," I said.

"Then we've got something in common. There's a fine collection at the Legion of Honor—French and German schools. How about breezing out to the gallery with me?"

"Suits me."

So around the middle of the morning, we jumped in Fred's Volkswagen and sped over to the Legion of Honor and parked on the esplanade overlooking the Golden Gate. Then we sat in the car until the gallery opened, while Fred talked about the relative merits of foreign cars and I got thoroughly bored and thought Fred pretty much of a fool.

But once we got inside the gallery and I heard him discourse on photographic techniques and effects, I revised my opinion. He really knew his stuff. The pictures were the usual street scenes, still lifes, landscapes, portraits, nudes, but Fred made me see them in a new way, from the standpoint of composition, subject matter, and design. He was a natural teacher, and his explanations made photographic technique seem vital and easy. I noticed, however, he lingered mostly over the nudes.

"You ought to do some pretty stunning photo work yourself," I said at last.

"I do. Would you like to see some?"

I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. Fortunately he suggested we go to lunch first, which gave me the advantage of viewing his collection on a full stomach. That gave me stamina, because on an empty stomach I get nervous and lose my self-control easily.

After lunch we returned to the big house and he led me to his studio at the back, on the main floor, a thickly-carpeted, heavily draped atelier two stories high, with a huge northern skylight. There were a lot of sofas and tables standing about, and Fred went to the east wall which was curtained like a proscenium, and took hold of a stout cord.

"Of course, you must judge these specimens purely from an artistic point of view," he said, with a trace of a smirk. "If one loses himself in the subject matter, then he becomes blind to the subtler values, the *raison d'être* of the medium, as it were."

And with that he pulled the cord and revealed a gallery of sumptuous pornographic art that was out of this world. But it was a super-pornographic art, with the devilish quality of genius in the lighting and arrangements of subjects, so that beyond the immediate significance of conjugating bodies and entwining limbs,

there was often, in the subtle light and shadow, a *total image* which impressed me as a veritable archetype of evil. Looking at some of the latter, I felt a sense of disgust, as if I were recoiling from an invitation to participate in the lust and license pictured before me.

I took a deep breath and turned away, knowing I'd have to get out of Edwin's house as soon as I could. At the same time, some instinct warned me against revealing my feelings to Fred.

"That's some show," I managed to say, with a smile.

Fred laughed delightedly, drew the curtain, and patted me fraternally on the shoulder.

"You'll do," he said, with the air of one giving a commendation.

I excused myself shortly and went up to my room and started throwing things hastily into my suitcase. I still had thirty dollars out of the fifty Edwin had given me, plus ten of my own, and it would keep me, I hoped, until I could find something. When I got a job, I'd send the fifty back to Edwin with a note of thanks. Right now, I just wanted out.

I had my suitcase in my hand, my hat on my head, when I heard a woman's voice crying out downstairs.

"Dan!"

I tossed my hat on the window seat, put the case inside my closet, and slipped into the hall.

"Dan!"

From below in the vestibule I could hear the sounds of a struggle, and I leapt down the stairs.

Philip Ordway had seized Felicia in his arms, and was trying to pull her into his room, and he was so busy, I don't think he was aware of me until I gave him a judo chop on the neck. He flopped down across his threshold, and I pushed him inside and closed the door. Then I put my arm around Felicia and piloted her upstairs to my room.

"And you said you weren't in any danger!" I said as she wept quietly. "This place is a pest hole. Listen, Felicia, I'm getting out. I've got my bag packed. Why don't you come with me? This is no place for you, either!"

"Oh, I couldn't leave Mrs. Owen," she said, her hand at her breast, where two or three buttons of her uniform had been ripped away. "Besides, if I left without notice, I'd never get another position. And I need the money, too, Dan."

"You don't care if you stay in a place where you've been attacked?"

"I'm sure it won't happen

again. I'll take better care of myself."

"Like you did just now?"

She began to cry again, and I felt helpless. I got down on my knees and took her hands in mine.

"You go, Dan," she said. "It isn't right that you should stay here. I've got to. Mrs. Owen needs me. And I'll be all right. I'll report this to Mr. Gentry. He's been very kind. I'm sure he'll take care of me."

That did it. The thought of Edwin taking care of Felicia stopped me cold, and I put all thoughts of leaving out of my mind.

"Never mind, Felicia," I said firmly, cupping her chin in my hand. "I'll be around to take care of you myself."

I kissed her, and it was sweet.

And suddenly I wished that what had happened between me and Linda—hadn't.

THAT EVENING Philip Ordway was not at supper nor, much to my relief, was Linda. Fred kept telling a lot of off-color stories until his father silenced him. Then, after a demitasse of Turkish coffee, Edwin motioned me to follow him into the library. I sat down on the sofa near the fire as he closed the big doors and locked them. Then after offering me a

cigar, he sat down opposite me in an armchair.

He puffed in silence for a while, studying me until I felt uncomfortably isolated on that big sofa.

Edwin didn't look like a genial bon vivant and host tonight. His welcoming eyes had turned calculating, and there was a glint of remorselessness in their dark depths. Then he smiled, and the hardness seemed to vanish.

"I'm very pleased with you, Dan," he said. "First, you're no prig. That gives me hope that you'll be able to agree to my point of view on life and business. Second, you can make a quick decision, and you're not afraid of violence."

"You mean Phil?"

"Yes, the young ass. He's through. I've been dissatisfied with his work for some time, and today, when he sneaked away from the office to come here, and—bah! A routine job is all he's fit for. I want you, Dan, to take his place!"

"What sort of job is it?" I asked him.

"You like to write. I need reports. You'll visit all the western cities where I have my outlets, and make a careful assessment of the activities of my dealers there. You will send the reports in once a week, and I'll pay you per word what no

newspaper on earth would pay you!"

"Sounds good. But what is your business, Edwin?"

He rose and went to a row of long drawers built into the wall. Unlocking one of them he took out three objects which he laid on the sofa beside me. The first was an egg-shaped piece of brown glass resembling a hand grenade, with a loop of wire at the top. The second object looked like a black pot holder enclosed in a plastic envelope, and the third was a blue steel tool of some kind, like a screw driver without a handle, and with a curious pattern of notches at one end.

I studied them a few seconds and then looked my question at Edwin.

"They are three of the hundreds of similar items which my company manufactures," he said. "Those simple things range in price from fifty to two hundred dollars."

"What makes them so valuable?"

"They supply a need, Dan." He sat down on the sofa beside me. "First, let's admit there is good and evil in the world."

"Okay."

"There's nothing you or I can do about it, is there?"

"Not personally, perhaps, but—"

"We're talking about in-



dividual enterprise, Dan. Evil is evil, and that is that. And where I can be sentimental about keeping an old lady like your grandmother in my house because your mother asked me to I can be ruthlessly practical about the fact of evil. There are moral people and immoral people, and nothing I can do will change that fact. And isn't it true that business men make a profit out of producing things the good people need? They print Bibles, for instance, they manufacture religious artifacts, reproduce works of art, record fine music, and so on. But the natural criminals have their needs, too. All moralizing aside, who supplies them? A handful

of manufacturers, in a very haphazard way. Well, I have organized an enterprise which supplies those needs very adequately. Whatever the appetite the criminal mind has, whatever evil desire, we supply the manufactured means of gratifying it."

I just stared as he took the blue steel tool out of my hand.

"This is the most mundane example. A burglar tool of the most ingenious and effective design, which has our money-back guarantee. It retails for a hundred and fifty dollars."

He picked up the brown glass egg.

"Arsonists will go to any length to satisfy their passion, especially if they can indulge it without risk of detection and yet assure a quick and satisfying blaze. This item is so designed. And we ask two hundred dollars for it."

"And they pay it?"

"Arson is often a sexual appetite, and not circumscribed to the poor alone." Edwin picked up the black cloth in the plastic case. "But this is quite the most expensive. A cloth in a vacuum receptacle, saturated with an especially prepared fluid which, when held under the nose of the victim, instantly brings semi-unconsciousness and acts as well as an aphrodisiac, with no danger to

the attacker. For the rapist, of course."

I jumped to my feet. "You call this a business?" I yelled. "You want me to be part of it? I'd rather have a good clean flunky job, like cleaning out bed pans! You can go to hell, Edwin. Kate was right. You are a man to stay away from. And now, if you don't mind, I'm getting out of here."

The door was locked, of course, and the key was gone. When I turned, Edwin stood looking at me, his face cold and dispassionate, like something you'd see staring out at you at the Steinhart aquarium.

"I didn't think I'd made a mistake. I thought sure you'd be one of us. Are you so stupid, Dan, that you don't understand? You can't leave now."

I stared at him and then my legs got weak and I sat down. It was true, knowing what I knew, I had either to join his organization, or—

"Oh, yes," Edwin answered my unspoken question. "If you don't take the job, there's only one way out, and I shall not hesitate to use it. I am building a tremendous business, and I can't have you knock it down like a child playing with blocks."

"Suppose I kept my mouth shut?"

"Unless you take part, I

cannot trust you, Dan. Surely you can see that." He shook his head sadly. "I wish you'd be like the rest of the family, son. We all pull together here. Well, you sleep on it, Dan."

He unlocked the door.

"Please don't try to get away."

I LEFT THE library then and went upstairs to my room. And found the third note:

Do not do anything foolish. Stay where you are.

I wadded the note up angrily and thrust it into my pocket. Who, in that inimical household, might have written it? Certainly not Edwin. Linda? Perhaps. Felicia? I didn't think so. Fred? I doubted whether Fred thought much about anybody but himself. Philip? Never.

Who, then?

In exasperation I lay down on the top of my bed in my shirt and trousers and, after a little while, dozed off.

I awoke with a start, a clear picture in my mind: the open end papers of the book on Grandma Moses, with the name *Maud Owen*, heavily block printed, like the notes I had received.

At the same time, a tactile memory returned, of the old lady's hand in mine, when I spoke to Felicia in the garden.

At first it had lain like a quiescent bird, then it stirred as I spoke to Felicia, until finally, when I had asked for help, grandmother's hand had become so tense, I had released it!

Grandmother Owen was not senile. She was pretending! I was sure now it was she who had written those notes. But who had slipped them under my door? Felicia?

I sat up in bed. I had to get out of my stepfather's house, and I had to get Felicia and my grandmother out, too!

Outside my door I could hear someone walking heavily up and down. There was a patch of light on my ceiling, shining up from the terrace below my window, and when I peeked out, I could see a man below, a stranger in khaki trousers and windbreaker, sitting in a chair reading a newspaper.

But my window was in shadow, and I saw a broad ledge that led, on my left, to the south-west corner of the house.

Presently, having put on my best dark blue suit for camouflage, I climbed out on the ledge and started shuffling, back pressed against the wall, towards the corner of the building. The guard looked up once, and I thought he'd seen me, but then he went on reading the newspaper. I slipped

around the corner, where, finding an ivy trellis, I climbed down to the ground and stood listening.

The pounding of the surf was amplified by a low cloudiness, and from a distance I could hear the whine of the beach line bus, starting up from a passenger stop.

Felicia's room, which adjoined Grandmother Owen's, lay directly under my own, and the window stood partly open.

I climbed across the sill and then hesitated as the blackness pressed against my eyes like a mask. I heard the tick of an alarm clock, and a sigh amid the rustle of bedclothes. My outstretched hand touched something, the shade of a lamp. I felt for its switch and turned the lamp on. Felicia was sitting up in bed with the blanket at her chin, staring at me.

"Oh, Dan!" She got out of bed, and slipped into a kimona. "I wasn't sleeping, I was worrying about you. Mr. Gentry ordered me to keep Mrs. Owen and myself to our rooms tonight. What's happened?"

"No time to talk. Get your clothes on. We're getting out of here. This the door to grandmother's room?"

"Dan, there's something—"

"I know. She's only pretending to be out of touch. But why?"

She ignored my question. "If you're in danger, Dan, she said she would save you."

I snorted. "Save me? I'm twenty-two years old and able-bodied. How could a little wisp of a woman like that save me?"

Before Felicia could answer, there was a sharp rapping from the hall door.

"Quick," I said, lunging for the door to grandmother's room. But I had barely time to get it open before there came a crash and the splintering wood, and Edwin was standing in the hall doorway, his face as murderous as the black muzzle of the gun he pointed at me.

"You've made your intentions very clear, Dan," he said.

Fred entered with Linda then, and they both looked at me with loathing, as if I had betrayed the family in some unspeakable fashion. Philip came too, loitering in the doorway.

"A general meeting of the board of directors?" I asked.

"You might call it that," Edwin said. "We just took a vote about what to do with you. Philip."

His nephew made a half-hearted attempt to come to attention.

"Philip, I'm giving you a chance to reinstate yourself." He put the gun in Phil's hand.

"Take Dan down to the furnace room. We'll stay here until it's over."

"What about her?" Phil was a big shot now.

"That's up to Miss Fox. We'll talk about it while you're gone."

Phil jabbed the gun in my back, and at that moment, Grandmother Owen appeared at her doorway, and came teetering into the room.

"I'll just sit down, if you don't mind," she said, as she lowered her fragile figure into a slipper chair. "I'm not much used to walking about, you know."

Edwin, with nothing to say for once, simply stared at her.

"Now put away that silly gun, Philip. You must let Dan alone. He's a good boy and deserves saving. Don't look so surprised, Edwin. When you started talking about having me institutionalized about three years ago, I knew it was because your secrets were getting too scandalous for me to hear, and you began to fear me. But I did not wish to be put away; I found it more interesting here, so long as you didn't try to harm anyone in my family. So I became senile, you see."

"And all this time—" Edwin managed to say.

"Yes, I have been aware of your activities. In a way,

though, they've been a blessing to me, because even at my age, I wanted to express myself—not in painting, like Grandma Moses, but in writing. Like Dan."

She gave me an affectionate look that reminded me of Aunt Kate. "And here, all around me, was a perfect subject. I would be the historian of Edwin's criminal family. So I wrote it all out in my book. I call it *My Life Among the Sinners*. It runs three hundred and fifty pages!"

"Where is that book!" Edwin took a step towards the old lady's bedroom.

"Oh, not in there. My last nurse was in on my secret, just as Felicia is. The other nurse mailed it for me, to Harper and Row. It must be over a month ago now."

"Harper and Row!"

"Oh, yes. It's all hand written, in ink, and held together with a ribbon. And I wrote a nice little letter with it, swearing on my honor it was all true!"

So those had not been medicinal stains on my grandmother's fingertips. They were ink stains!

Fred said: "They won't even read the manuscript, dad."

Edwin looked relieved, but only for a moment.

"But I also made a condensed article and sent it to

Harper's Magazine," Grandmother Owen said serenely. "That was about a month ago, too. And just the other day, the day that Dan arrived, I sent a copy of the article to the San Francisco Police department. You mailed it, didn't you, Felicia?"

Felicia nodded.

"I don't believe any of it!" Linda said. "She's just making all this up to save Dan."

"Oh, no," the old lady assured her. "I know they received it all right—the police."

"How do you know that?"

Edwin stood stiffly over my grandmother as if he were about to strike her. I watched my chance with Philip, who had moved off from me. His gun was drooping, his eyes were on his uncle.

Grandmother Owen smiled sweetly up at Edwin.

"They told me they received it when I telephoned them, not ten minutes ago. They ought to be here by now."

At that instant, I sliced my hand down on Phil's wrist and the gun went clattering to the floor. Then I had it in my hand, and the good guys had the lead.

Edwin faced me with a face white and twitching as grandmother held up one thin hand. "Yes, I think I hear them now, Edwin."

There came the screech of brakes in the driveway, and then a couple of shots, and, during the brief time that Edwin's guards took their work seriously, only three things happened in the room.

Edwin started cursing.

Felicia gave me a little hug.

And, from across the room, Grandmother Owen winked at me affectionately.

In the Next Issue

THE DISAPPEARING TRUCKS

A New RICK HARPER Adventure

by DAVID MAZROFF

The man in the big chair got to his feet and I saw the flame of murder in his eyes. He said, "I got news for you, fink. Get out of this city. Now. On your own power. Or—" he nodded darkly—"Permanent. Feet first."

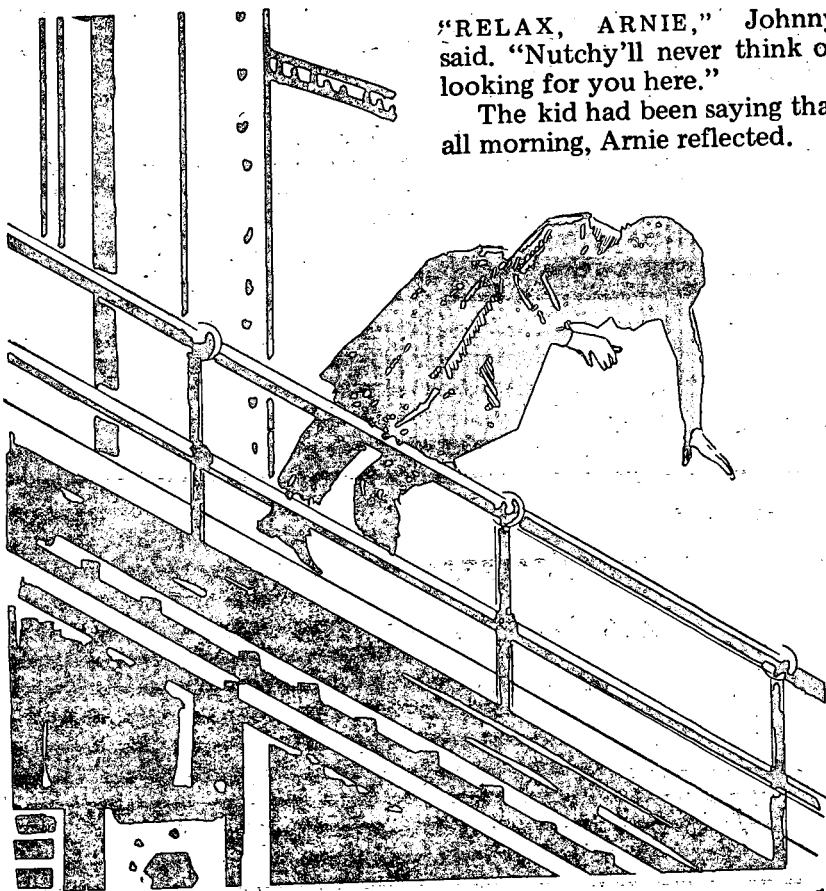
The Sitting Duck

by ARTHUR MOORE

It was a ship of brooding death, and every shadow could have framed the shape of my killer. Could I find him in time—and could I strike before he got me first?

"RELAX, ARNIE," Johnny said. "Nutchy'll never think of looking for you here."

The kid had been saying that all morning, Arnie reflected.



"Turn it over," he replied, "You played that side."

"I mean it," Johnny said, wrinkling his smooth young forehead. He got up as the all ashore gongs sounded. "Only a little while now." He glanced out the river side porthole. "In a couple weeks we'll be in Rio. Nutchy'll never—"

"All right, all right," Arnie sighed. He was a tall man, gray hair, business looking if you didn't count, the ugly scar below his right ear, conservative clothes and a thin, rather hawk profile.

He was very pale. His first look at the sun in about three weeks had been that morning when Johnny had picked him up for the drive to the pier. As Johnny so tiresomely kept saying, Nutchy would never think of looking for him on a cruise ship.

Nutchy was turning the town upside down looking for him because Arnie had managed to divert a huge shipment of heroin from Nutchy to a guy in Chicago. The guy in Chicago had arranged for a satisfyingly large amount of money to be deposited to Arnie Warga's account in Buenos Aires. It was all very neat and business-like except that Nutchy had been double-crossed, and Nutchy had always loathed that kind of thing.

So a contract had gone out on him, Arnie Warga.

Arnie had expected it. He had holed up like a beaver. He had waited till the arrangements had been made and now he was on the ship; and the ship would be sailing in a few minutes.

"I'm going-out on deck and watch the send-off," Johnny said. "You better stay in here."

"Yeah," Arnie said automatically. Picking up a cigarette, he heard the door to the suite slam. Johnny had never been on a ship before. The kid was just a bodyguard, hired for the cruise, and he'd been nervous and fussy all morning.

Arnie lit the cigarette and frowned. Why had Johnny said, 'You better stay in here'?

He shook his head. He was getting jumpy too, picking up on any little thing. But it was a funny thing to say, especially since Johnny had been repeating all morning, 'Nutchy'll never find you here.' Did Johnny know something?

Arnie dropped the cigarette into a tray and slipped out into the corridor. It was jammed with people, stewards with telegrams, a few porters pushing trolleys piled with luggage, visitors straggling to the gangways. He turned right, went up the stairs to the promenade deck and looked around for Johnny. The kid ought to be making

sure their bags arrived promptly.

It was noisy. Hundreds of people were shouting, some crying, and most were tossing colorful paper streamers to those on shore. Arnie wedged himself into a place by the rail, drawn into the excitement of sailing despite himself. The hundreds of streamers seemed to tie the great ship to the pier. People were crowding the gangways; the 'all ashore' gongs sounded again. A band was playing *Auld Lang Syne*...

Arnie allowed himself a small thin smile. Nutchy's boys had been watching the bus stations, the airports, the depots for several weeks, expecting him to make a break for it. And Nutchy probably had feelers in all the big towns to see where he, Arnie, showed up. But how would it occur to Nutchy that he'd buy a ticket on a cruise ship with a lot of fat tourists? Nutchy wouldn't think that kind of a ship would be a getaway vehicle. He didn't think that way. Nutchy was slick and very clever, but he'd expect Arnie to go by plane, maybe a private plane, but fast.

This cruise ship was slow as cold glue.

As Arnie watched, the last visitors shouted, waved and ran. The gangways were hoisted and swung outboard. He could hear

the sirens, the booming, deep-toned blast of the ship's salute. They were moving! He took a deep, relieved breath as the paper tape began to break and curl, much of it falling into the widening green water gap. People yelled and waved—and then he saw Johnny.

Arnie stiffened. Johnny was off the ship! He was standing in the shadow of the gray Customs shed, smiling at the crowds.

It took a second for the thought to percolate, and Arnie's blood ran icy. Johnny was on shore—and the guy beside him was Nutchy! No doubt about it at all; he knew Nutchy from way back. As he stared, the two of them turned and disappeared inside the building.

The ship was a trap.

Arnie left the rail, his mind in a daze. Johnny had sold out to Nutchy! Damn the kid! Johnny had seen him on board, luggage and all, then had walked off with the last visitors. Now Arnie Warga was a sitting duck...because that meant there was a hit guy on board.

Some one of the passengers was a professional killer.

Otherwise Nutchy would never have let him sail. And now he couldn't get off the ship until Bermuda, at least, a tiny little place. What he'd thought was a perfect getaway had turned into a trap. Arnie went

across the ship and clung to the rail, dully watching the tugs nosing the liner into the stream. Come out of it, he told himself, you have often had shocks before.

But it was a terrible shock seeing the kid, Johnny, there on the dock talking to his enemy. Johnny had come from out of town. How had Nutchy got to him? Nutchy was a slick one, all right. Well, he'd sweat it out, because Nutchy was forgetting one thing. He, Arnie, had once been a hit guy too. He could strike back.

Arnie went to his suite before the Statue of Liberty slid past. There was only one thing he could do. Get the killer before the guy got him. That was first. Of course he had to figure out which one, among all the passengers, was the one. He had a drink and thought about it. It shouldn't be that hard to spot the guy. Most of the passengers, he had seen hundreds of them, were fat, middle-aged, hung with cameras, had fat wives or skinny wives and not one had the look. It took a special kind of guy to be a triggerman. He knew a lot of them and none were fat and dumpy middle-aged types.

He rang for Bates, the steward, requesting a passenger list and a run-down on all the names. He gave Bates a fifty

and the steward smiled and disappeared.

The light was fading when the Sandy Hook light slid by and the ship's motion began to change. They came round and headed southeast into the Atlantic. At the porthole, Arnie stared at the cold sea. He could make it very tough for Nutchy's guy by staying in the cabin, having his meals there even—but it wouldn't solve anything. The guy would stick to him like a poor relation because he wouldn't get the rest of his dough till Arnie was planted.

Bates brought the passenger list and a handful of notes on the names. It wasn't much help.

In the dining room that first evening, Arnie looked over the crowd. Many had stayed in their cabins, queasy. He saw no one who might be the guy. It wasn't till the next day that he spotted a man who looked vaguely familiar. The man was chunky and dark, had black hair and a deep tan. He was immaculate in a silk suit with a vacuous blonde on his arm. He walked with a slight limp and carried a heavy cane.

Arnie's eyes narrowed. He had a better than average memory for faces. He had seen this customer somewhere before, but where? And if he had noted him, the guy was probably in the rackets. Only not in the Big



Town. Philly or Chicago maybe. He couldn't place the circumstances, which was curious because he should remember a guy with a limp.

On the promenade deck that afternoone he asked Bates to put names to a half dozen couples, the man with the cane among them. The guy's tag was Sandeman. It didn't ring a bell. He looked up Sandeman on the passenger list. Sandeman, Walter, traveling with his wife, Cleo. They were from Allentown, according to the list, and Sandeman was in construction.

Constructing cemeteries, maybe, Arnie thought grimly. At dinner that evening he man-

aged to sit where he could keep Sandeman in view.

Now and then Sandeman looked his way too. Was he a trifle too interested? He wasn't much of an actor. A hit guy didn't have to be an Academy Award winner, but Sandeman was overplaying his role. He ought to be cool and detached. Of course, Arnie reflected, he himself had been around a long time. Maybe the guy was a little nervous going up against an old hand. But Sandeman had mob written all over him, and his wife didn't help. She was an ex-chorus cutie if Arnie had ever seen one. She looked as out of place in a cruise ship as a snapping turtle in a top hat.

Why had the guy picked a handle like Sandeman? Arnie paused, a soup spoon halfway to his lips. That was Nutchy's little touch. Nutchy was noted for his pratt-fall type jokes; this was the kind of humor Nutchy was crazy about. Sandeman for sandman, the guy who puts you to sleep. Arnie could see Nutchy falling down laughing as he told the boys how he had put Arnie Warga to sleep with a sandman.

During the next days he surreptitiously studied and avoided Sandeman. What was in the cane, a sword? He was wary of the cane. Sandeman was never without it. If Sandeman was

good with it, he could slug a guy, hook him with the curved end and have his victim over the side in a split second.

Arnie rubbed his chin reflectively. He had no weapon at all, hadn't thought he'd need one on a cruise. But Sandeman didn't know that. The guy would have to figure Arnie to be heeled.

Arnie studied all the passengers, just to be certain. But no one else on board fitted the bill. Bates told him there had been no change in ship's personnel for months except for those people who could not get top-side to mingle with the passengers.

He made his plan. He would take Sandeman unexpectedly; he would hit the guy on the boatdeck late at night, sap him and slide him to the sharks.

Sandeman and the overdressed blonde had fallen into shipboard habits, as many did. They took regular walks around the decks in the forenoon and played cards after lunch. Cléo was always close, Arnie noted. She was given to batting her long lashes at males, so Sandeman kept her on a tight leash.

Late at night the two of them went for more turns about the deck, sometimes talking, sometimes arguing.

When the ship called at Bermuda, Arnie went ashore and

bought several small souvenir ashtrays, the kind that fitted over the arms of couches and are loaded with small lead pellets. In his cabin he slit them open, loaded a black sock with the pellets and gave the covers the deep nine. The sock made a perfect sap, easy to get rid of.

During the first few days all passengers had been introduced. Arnie had nodded to Sandeman and the cutie several times since. The day the ship left Bermuda he was standing at the rail near the Sandeman couple. The blonde was chattering about some trinket or other she had bought in one of the stores, and when Sandeman's attention wandered, Arnie heard her say, "Mick, you're not listenin'..."

She called him Mick. It seemed to catch in his memory, just beyond recall. Where had he seen this guy? It was frustrating that he couldn't remember. It wasn't till the next day that it came to him.

Sandeman was about to sit down in a deck chair. He slammed his shin into the hard wooden end of the chair and instead of reacting to pain, made no sign. The shinbone made a sound very unlike flesh.

Arnie turned his head, smiling out to sea. Sandeman had a wooden leg below the knee! It all fell into place. He had seen the guy's picture in the papers

—five years ago. No wonder Nutchy was sure Sandeman's cover was secure. Five years is a long time. Sandeman's name had been Mick Ricavali then. He had been involved in a gang wipe-out and had been one of the few survivors.

Arnie avoided the bar that afternoon and evening. He wanted to be cold sober, in complete command. There was no sense in waiting longer. He'd do it that night.

But watch out for the cane.

He had already picked out the place. When Sandeman and the wriggling blonde went out on the misty deck for the midnight walk, Arnie waited for them on the boatdeck. He stood in the small space between two lifeboats, the loaded sap held lightly in his right hand, at his side. It was dark and shadowy on the deck. An orchestra was playing inside where one of the endless ship-arranged parties was winding down.

Arnie felt keyed up. It was like the old days again, a long time ago, when he was on the way to the top. One of his first jobs had been that of convincing guys to pay what they owed—or else. He would do this one quick, then slug the girl too. He couldn't afford a witness. It was too bad about her, and it would cause a sensation

when both Sandemans disappeared into thin air, but there would be no evidence, nothing. Nothing to connect him to the affair. Nutchy, you lose again.

When the strolling couple came close, Arnie Warga stepped out of the shadows.

"Mick," he said.

Sandeman stopped short, leaning forward, peering at him.

"Who's 'at?" The cane rose.

"It's me," Arnie growled. He clipped Sandeman on the side of the head, smoothly, very expertly. The guy made hardly a sound. The cane clattered on the deck, and the blonde gave a little squeak, staring as though terror-stricken. She seemed frozen. Arnie caught Sandeman as he slumped, pushed him against the rail and tipped him over. It was done in one slick, fast motion.

Arnie glanced down, catching a glimpse of the dark body as it hit the water in a pinkish phosphorescent splash.

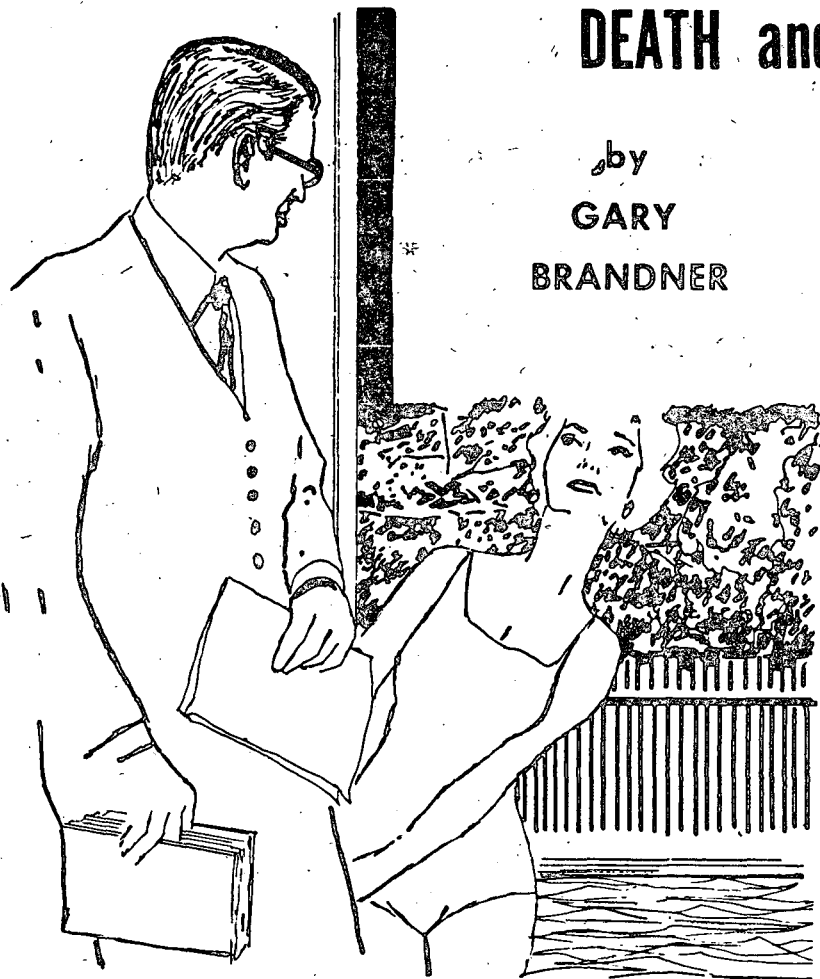
Then he heard the sharp reports of a twenty-five auto at close range. He felt the slam of the slugs, and he knew instantly that Sandeman had been a decoy. He had one fast look at the blonde, smiling.

"G'bye, baby," she said, "Nutchy sends his love."

Arnie was conscious long enough to feel the first shock of the water.

DEATH and

by
GARY
BRANDNER



*She was a delectable cookie, fashioned for
man's sampling. Now she was dead. Could
I find the man who had done it?*

the SINGLE GIRL

IT TOOK a while for my eyes to adjust to the dim light in the Golden Goose. Then it took a while longer for me to recognize Gil Foster sitting alone in a rear booth. In the three years since I last saw him Gil had grown deep sideburns, added a moustache, and mod-styled his hair.

I picked up my beer and carried it over to the booth.

"Hello, Gil," I said.

He jumped as though I'd blown a police whistle in his ear. For a couple of heartbeats he stared at me wildly, then his face relaxed as recognition came.

"Dukane, you bandit. What brings you downtown?"

"Would you believe I happened to be passing by?"

"No."

"You're right. Lillian called me."

He dropped his gaze to the tabletop. "You mean my wife had to get a private detective after me? What more does she want? She's got the kids, the house, the station wagon, the bank account."

"Come off it," I said. "Lillian called me as a friend of the family, not a detective, and you know it. She has an idea you're in some kind of trouble, and

she asked me to see if I could help."

"I'm sorry, Dukane," he said. "Sit down. I guess I'm just surprised to see you."

"Yeah, it's been a long time."

"Lil and I talked about having you over for dinner a hundred times, but—well, you know how it is."

I knew all right. Old friends from the husband's bachelor days don't fit into the family scene. I said, "It was a surprise to hear you'd moved out."

Gil tried to toss it off casually. "It's no big deal, really. The marriage got stale. Boredom breaks up more couples than infidelity, you know. What gave Lil the idea that I was in trouble?"

"She said you suddenly stopped coming around to see the kids."

"It was doing more harm than good. She's got to understand that I'm living a different life now."

"So I hear. She said you had a place in Manhattan Beach, the Surf Apartments."

"That's right. I moved in two months ago after a few weeks in a furnished room in Hollywood."

"Are those swinging singles

places as much fun as they look like in the ads?"

Gil shrugged and glanced at his watch. "It depends on where your head is at." He looked up at me and his eyes narrowed. "How did you find me here, anyway?"

"I went to your office first. Your secretary said I might find you here celebrating your promotion. Does that mean your name will go on the door—Prescott, Stearns, and *Foster*?"

"Not quite. It means that starting next week I'll handle some of the bigger institutional investors and turn my individual accounts over to a new man." He glanced at the time, which was a quarter after two.

"You're keeping your celebrating nicely under control," I said.

But Gil wasn't listening to me any longer. His attention was directed over my shoulder toward the door. I turned around in time to see a beautifully packaged blonde heading our way.

Gil stood up and let the girl in on his side of the booth. He introduced her to me as Bunnie Moran, a neighbor of his at the Surf.

Bunnie smiled and frisked me with her sky-blue eyes.

"You're the first old friend of Gil's I've met," she said.

"Gil and I haven't seen each

other for quite a while," I said.

"How nice that you should run into each other here."

"Yeah."

There followed one of those dead silences in which everybody feels paralyzed. I drained my beer and stood up.

"I'll be on my way. Take care, Gil."

"So long, Dukane," he said with obvious relief. "We'll have to get together soon."

"Sure. To meet you, Bunnie."

The girl switched a smile on and off and dismissed me from the scene. Before I reached the door Gil was talking intently to her while Bunnie looked straight ahead.

Manhattan Beach, twenty miles south of downtown Los Angeles, is known for broad sandy beaches and airline stewardesses. The Surf is a new apartment complex half a mile up from the ocean. It was built in the shape of a square donut, and covered an entire block.

I walked in through a gap in the donut. Beyond the heavy tropical vegetation of the inner court I could see a sparkling blue swimming pool. The individual apartments, each with its own patio or balcony, ringed the court. As I stood peering around, a well-tanned girl in a tiny swimsuit strolled over to join me. She had green

eyes and a good honest smile.

"Are you looking for an apartment?" she asked.

"It's a thought."

"My name's Rachel Coombs. You'll like it here."

"Mine's Dukane, and I'm liking it already. Are you the manager?"

"No, that's Aaron. You'll find him cleaning up the game room from last night's party to get it ready for tonight's party." She pointed to a section of the building on my right with a glass door facing out on the court.

I thanked Rachel Coombs and watched with appreciation as she swung away toward the pool.

The game room was maybe half as long as a football field. A long bar stretched across the far end. In the center was a dance floor surrounded by night club style tables and a bandstand. Near the door three young men shot a bored game of pool.

A bulletin board just inside the entrance was thick with tacked-up announcements and messages. A typed schedule informed me that in addition to the party tonight, this week's activities included scuba diving lessons, a pingpong tournament, a class in yoga, a Synanon-type encounter group, and a folk song festival.

"Can I help you?" said a mild voice behind me.

The speaker was a head shorter than my six feet three. Something about him seemed out of balance, then I saw that his right sleeve was pinned up and empty.

"You're the manager?" I asked.

"That's right. Aaron Judd."

"My name is Dukane."

"I have a couple of singles available—that's with the sofa-bed—and a really nice bedroom one. I don't suppose you're looking for anything bigger than that?"

"To tell the truth, I'm not looking for an apartment at all."

"Oh?" The wide welcoming smile slipped away.

"What I'm after is some information about one of your tenants—Gil Foster."

"Are you police?"

"I'm a private investigator, but this isn't exactly business. Gil Foster is an old friend of mine."

"What is it you want to know?" As he talked, Aaron Judd walked back to the dance floor and started up an electric floor polisher. I followed. "Foster has been here two months now. Pays his rent on time. He's a little older than most of the tenants, about your age. We don't get many over thirty here.

At least not many who'll admit it."

"Do you know of any trouble Gil might have been in?" I asked.

Judd snapped off the polisher and looked at me closely. "What kind of trouble?"

"That's what I'm asking you."

He started the machine again. "If he was, I don't know about it. It's not my job to nose into people's private lives."

"Signing up some new talent, Aaron?" It was Rachel Coombs, now wearing a short velvet robe that still showed plenty of leg.

"Not this time," Judd answered.

To me the girl said, "Aaron hates to rent to good looking fellas. He wants us girls all for himself."

The manager grinned self-consciously. "I—I better go see about the lights by the pool." He stashed the floor polisher and hurried out.

"How come you decided not to move in?" Rachel asked. "Don't you like us?"

"What I've seen I like just fine, but I'm happy where I live now. What I really came here for was to ask about a friend of mine, Gil Foster. Do you know him?"

"Uh-huh. Gil doesn't seem like the type for this place,

somehow. Oh, he dresses mod and talks hip and all that swing-in' bachelor hype, but it doesn't go well on him. Maybe I'm just talking sour grapes since he was grabbed off as soon as he moved in."

"By Bunnie Moran?"

"That's right, dear Bunnie. Do you know her too?"

"Just barely. What kind of a girl is she?"

"It wouldn't be fair for me to tell you. I'm prejudiced. But if you're really interested, ask superstud over there at the pool table."

Following Rachel's glance, I saw that two of the pool players had gone away, leaving a well-built individual with an arrogant mouth and a cascade of black curls over his forehead.

"That's Ken Tregorian," Rachel continued. "He was pretty tight with Bunnie until your friend moved in."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll talk to him."

"Hey," she stopped me as I turned. "Come to the party tonight, why don't you?"

"Maybe I'll do that."

I sauntered over to the pool table and watched enough of Tregorian's cue handling to know I could beat him one-handed if I tried.

"Want to shoot a game?" he asked without looking up.

"Why not?"

After I purposely muffed a couple of easy shots Tregorian relaxed and became more talkative.

"You movin' in?"

"I don't think so."

"Too bad. There's plenty of broads available."

"I hear you do all right."

"Oh, let's say I get my share. You a friend of Rachel's?"

"Just met her."

"Nice legs, but she's a little square. Know what I mean?"

"She said you used to go with Bunnie Moran."

"Not 'go with,' man. Big Ken doesn't 'go with' anybody. We had a few chuckles is all."

"And she left you for a guy like Gil Foster?" I said.

"Come on, man. Bunnie's a purpose girl. Foster bought her pretty things and paid her rent. Me, I get it for free or I don't play."

"You say Gil Foster pays Bunnie's rent?"

"Sure. I don't know who was keeping her before he took over, but it wasn't Bunnie and it sure as hell wasn't me. I'll tell you one thing, though, the guy wasn't getting his money's worth. I ought to know. Know what I mean? Foster at least keeps her close to home. No more playin' around."

"That's tough." I ran the table in a hurry then and went out to my car, leaving superstud



to wonder how I got good at pool so fast.

I ate dinner at a Mexican restaurant on Beverly and tried to come up with some words for Lillian Foster to the effect that she could quit worrying about her husband. On the surface it looked like the only trouble Gil was in was that he was being taken for a ride by Bunnie Moran. Still, I had an uneasy feeling that something more was going on. Maybe it was for that reason, or maybe because of the green eyes and long legs of Rachel Coombs, I decided to go to the party at the Surf Apartments.

It was nine o'clock when I got there, and the party sounds spilled out of the building into the street. Inside cigarette smoke fogged the air faster than the air conditioner could pump it out. A stereo set with the volume at agony level screamed from the bandstand. A tangle of bodies jerked and writhed on the dance floor. On my way to the bar I passed Ken Tregorian

with a girl on each arm laughing hysterically at whatever he was saying.

I got a bourbon and water at the bar and pushed over to join Aaron Judd, who sat at the far end with a cup of coffee.

"Back again?" he said.

"So it seems. I haven't seen Gil Foster around. Is he here?"

Judd waved his arm toward the packed dance floor. "I think he's out there somewhere."

I recognized the pair of legs coming toward me. They grew upwards into a short yellow dress topped by the green-eyed face of Rachel Coombs.

"Hi," she said. "I wasn't sure you were coming."

"I wouldn't have missed it."

"Come on and dance with me."

"To this?"

Rachel took my hand and tugged me out into the mob. "It's easy, you'll see."

Aaron Judd gave me a sympathetic look as I let my glass down and followed Rachel. She went into some pretty sexy gyrations while I shuffled my feet and wished I was somewhere else.

Nobody paid any attention to my clumsiness, and I had a chance to look around for Gil. Finally I saw him across the floor with Bunnie Moran. They were over by the door to the

court, and they were yelling at each other. At least I assumed they were yelling. I couldn't hear anything over the music, but their jaws were going at the same time and Gil was turning red. They were loud enough at least to attract the attention of the nearby dancers.

When Gil saw people watching he leaned closer to Bunnie and jabbed his finger toward the door. She flung a couple of last words at him and sailed out into the jungle. Gil whirled away from her and elbowed his way toward the bar.

Shouting into the din of the stereo, I thanked Rachel for the dance and followed Gil. My partner danced on without me.

Gil had thrown down one straight whiskey and was calling for a second by the time I reached his side. He turned an angry face toward me.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Learning to dance. What was the beef with Bunnie?"

"None of your business, Dukane. Why don't you butt out?"

He had me there. I had done as much as I promised Lillian, and from here on it was none of my business. I said, "All right, Gil. I'll see you around."

He put a hand on my shoulder as I started to leave. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I do

want to talk to you about it, but not now. Maybe later, okay?"

"Okay," I said.

Gil made a weak attempt at a smile and took off through the crowd toward the door where Bunnie went out. I lit a cigarette and let the party eddy around me. When Rachel didn't show up again I crushed out the butt and headed for the street door. I was halfway across the room when the amplified music was ripped down the middle by a piercing sound from out in the court.

A scream.

I raced out the door and along the path in front of the patios. Rounding a corner, I almost knocked down a plump girl in a flowered dress. She filled her lungs for another scream, but held it in when I grabbed her by the shoulders. I started to ask what the trouble was, but I looked into the apartment off the nearest patio and saw for myself.

Gil Foster stood in the open doorway. His face was pale and dead sober. He held his hands awkwardly in front of him as though they belonged to somebody else. They were stained blood red.

"What happened?" I said.

Gil shook his head as though denying the words even as he spoke them.

"Bunnie's in there. She's dead."

I stepped past him into the apartment. The only light came from the colored bulbs out in the court. I moved in to have a closer look at what lay on the sofa. Bunnie Moran looked up at me with eyes that would see no more. The front of her sweater was soaked dark with blood. Just below her left breast was a hunting knife, driven in to the hilt.

People were starting to gather outside on the patio to peer in. I located Aaron Judd and told him to keep people out of the apartment while I called the police. On my way to the phone I passed Ken Tregorian, superstud, being sick into the swimming pool.

The police arrived and took statements from the party guests while a team from the crime lab went over the scene. I hung around eavesdropping, and what I heard didn't sound good for Gil. Quite a few people saw the argument he had with Bunnie. She was killed in his apartment, and he was seen coming out with blood on his hands.

Gil himself seemed to be in shock. He answered questions in monosyllables, not always making sense.

Finally the coroner's people took away the body and Gil

was driven off in a police car. When I had a chance I called Lillian and told her what had happened. She took it pretty well and said she would have her lawyer come down to Manhattan Beach in the morning. I wished her luck and started to hang up, but she stopped me.

"Dukane, will you go down with the lawyer to see Gil?"

"If you want me to, but I don't know how I can help."

"Please," she said. "Gil will need all the support he can get."

"I'll be there," I said. "Have your man give me a call when he's ready to go."

As I hung up I saw that the party was coming back to life. I got out of there and went home.

Gil's attorney was a pink-faced young man named Wallach. I met him at the Manhattan Beach police station and we waited together for them to bring Gil out. They let us use a small bare room behind the jailer's desk, and Gil told us his version of what happened at the party.

"We had a big fight on the dance floor, Bunnie and I. An argument, I mean. I guess everybody in the world saw it. I told Bunnie to go wait in my apartment and I'd come out in a minute and we'd finish it in private. I had a couple more

drinks—we were both pretty smashed already—and went on out through the court.

"The lights were out in my apartment, but I could make out Bunnie lying on the sofa. I thought maybe she'd passed out there. I called her name but she didn't answer. I went over and touched her to wake her up. My hands came away wet with her blood."

"What was the argument about?" I asked.

"Is that important?"

"It might be," Wallach put in. "Was it just a lovers' spat?"

Gil didn't answer for several seconds. When he did his voice was flat and weak.

"I'm afraid there was more to it than that. It will all come out Monday anyway, so I guess there's no use trying to hide it. I've been embezzling money from my firm, selling off stocks in my accounts without the owners' knowledge. I gave most of the cash to Bunnie. It was supposed to be a loan to help her set up a modeling agency. When I got my promotion I knew there would be an audit before I turned the accounts over to a new man, and the shortage would be discovered.

"I told Bunnie I had to have the money back right away. She stalled me for several days, then finally refused outright, saying as far as she was concerned it

was a gift. I was making one last try to talk her into it last night. I guess I didn't do so good."

While Wallach talked legal strategy I went over Gil's story in my mind, and had to admit that he didn't do good at all. When they took Gil back to his cell a man from the district attorney's office stopped in looking pleased with himself.

"As a friendly tip," he said to Wallach, "you'd better plead your man guilty. I could convict him right now of Second Degree, and all I need is a solid motive to make it Murder One."

"I'll need time to study the evidence," Wallach said, but he didn't sound hopeful.

"We have plenty for you to study," the D.A.'s man said cheerfully.

"What was the official cause of death?" I asked.

"A single stab wound that penetrated the right ventricle of the heart. Death was almost instantaneous."

"What about the weapon?"

"A cheap hunting knife, available at any sporting goods store."

"Fingerprints?"

"Not on the knife. The handle was wiped clean, but we won't need them to build a case against Foster."

Wallach hung around to see what bail arrangements could

be made, but an idea was starting to grow in my head so I left and drove to a shopping center on Pacific Coast Highway. There I made two purchases at a sporting goods store and carried them with me in a paper bag to the Surf Apartments.

I found Aaron Judd one-handling a mop over the dance floor in the party room while



Ken Tregorian idly poked balls around the pool table. Neither had a greeting for me. I walked carefully across the wet floor and talked to Judd.

"Quiet around here today."

"It always is the morning after a party," he said.

"I suppose so. Are the police around?"

"No. They finished up in Foster's apartment about an hour ago and left."

"Would you mind letting me into the apartment?"

"What for?" he asked, eyeing the paper bag.

"I want to try something."

Tregorian sidled over to listen in.

"You can help too," I told him.

"What do you mean 'try something?'" Judd said.

"Come on," Tregorian put in. "It might be kicks."

"All right," Judd agreed after a hesitation. "It better not take long, though, I've got other work to do."

"It won't take long," I assured him.

As we crossed the court Rachel Coombs came out of the building and fell in beside me.

"I thought I saw you drive up," she said. "There's something I want to talk to you about."

"Sure," I said, "right after we're finished here. Come on along."

Judd let us into Gil's apartment with a passkey. The police had tidied up somewhat, but you knew they had been there. Fingerprint powder smudged the wall here and there, a dead flashbulb had rolled into a corner, and a sheet was thrown over the sofa where Bunnie Moran had died.

Rachel hung back as I walked up to the sofa, but the two men followed closely.

I opened the bag and took out a styrofoam belly board, the kind small children use for surf riding. I laid it flat on the sofa. Then I pulled out the hunting knife I had bought and

plunged it hilt-deep into the board, leaving it there.

Rachel gasped. The men watched me silently.

"What's that supposed to prove?" Tregorian said.

"Wait and see. Now pretend for a minute that this is the dead Bunnie Moran. The killer would not want to carry the bloody knife out of the room and risk meeting somebody, but he doesn't want to leave his fingerprints either. So what he does is wipe the knife clean. Let's see you do it, Tregorian. Wipe the prints off the knife."

"Like hell I will. Not until you tell me what this is all about."

"Do you have a special reason for not wanting to touch the knife?" I said.

Tregorian glared at me for a moment, then he reached down and yanked out the weapon. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and vigorously wiped the handle while holding the blade, keeping cloth between his fingers and the steel. When he finished he tossed the knife back onto the sofa and pocketed the handkerchief.

"Well?" he said.

I turned to Rachel. "Did you see anything unusual in the way he did that?"

The girl shook her head, watching me with large green eyes. "I'm not sure what you

mean, but it looked all right to me."

"How about you, Judd?" I asked.

"So he wiped off the knife. What do you want me to say?"

"So we all agree that the actions were natural," I said. "Just about anybody wanting to wipe his fingerprints off would have done it pretty much the way Tregorian did."

I picked up the knife and stabbed it once more into the styrofoam board.

I turned to face Aaron Judd. "Now you do it."

He didn't move. Slowly Judd's head rolled and he looked down at his empty sleeve.

"A man with only one arm couldn't do it that way, could he," I said.

Working left handed I drew out my own handkerchief, leaned down and wiped the knife handle clean. The blade stayed sunk in the belly board. "That's the way you would do it, isn't it, Judd?"

"What of it?" he snapped.

"When Bunnie was found the knife was still in her. There was only one wound, so it hadn't been pulled out, then stuck back in. The handle was wiped clean by a man who couldn't use two hands. You, Judd."

"I had no reason to do

that," he said. "I liked Bunnie."

"It was more than 'liked,' wasn't it, Judd? Weren't you paying her rent before Gil Foster took over?"

Judd sagged as though the vital juices were seeping out of him. "She told me she would be my girl. Not many girls will even look at a guy who's... crippled. Not girls like Bunnie, anyway. I never tried to own her or anything like that. All I wanted was just to come and see her once in a while. Bunnie didn't want anybody else to know about us, but that was all right with me.

"Then she met that Foster guy someplace and talked him into moving here. He started paying her rent and giving her other money besides. I couldn't match that. Bunnie cut me off without so much as a thank you. It kept eating at my mind. I wanted to hurt her back somehow. Then I saw her go to Foster's apartment alone last night while he was at the bar. I got my knife and I came out here and I killed her. I slipped out and hid in the bushes just before Foster came in and found her."

Tregorian stared at us with his mouth open. Rachel turned away and seemed to be crying. I took Judd, now docile as a child, back to his office and called the police. After they

came and took him away I put in a call to Lillian and filled her in.

"I don't know what will come of the stock shuffling business," I said, "but maybe Gil can work something out with Prescott and Stearns. Anyway, good luck. To both of you."

"Dukane, I don't know how to thank you. If we ever get our lives straightened out again, Gil and I, we're going to want to see a lot more of you. Promise now, you hear?"

"Sure," I said, knowing I would probably never see either of them again. "Good-by, Lillian."

As I walked out of the Surf I saw that Rachel Coombs was waiting at my car. She had

changed into a green pants suit that matched her eyes.

"I didn't get that chance to talk to you," she said when I reached the car.

"That's right. What was it about?"

"About apartment hunting. I've had enough of the swingin' singles atmosphere. I thought you might have some ideas about where I could look for another place. Maybe closer to your neighborhood?"

For a minute I looked down at her, then I grinned. "Yeah, I might have some ideas. Let's have lunch and talk about it."

Rachel smiled back and slid into the Chevvy next to me. She smelled like spring flowers, and all of a sudden I felt a whole lot better.

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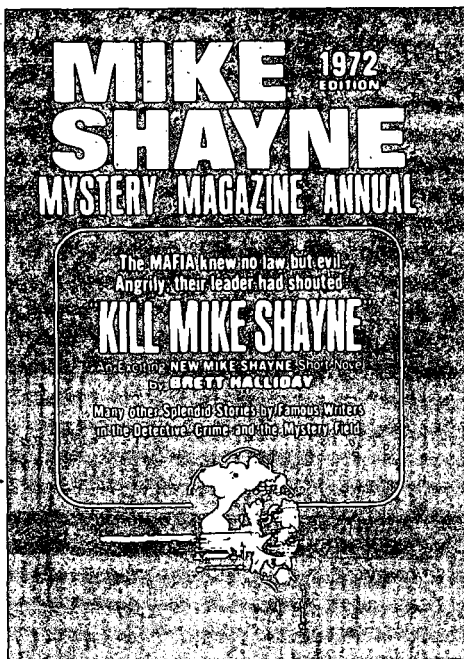
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ANOTHER



CLASSIC

THE SPINDLE CLUE

by ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

Introduction by

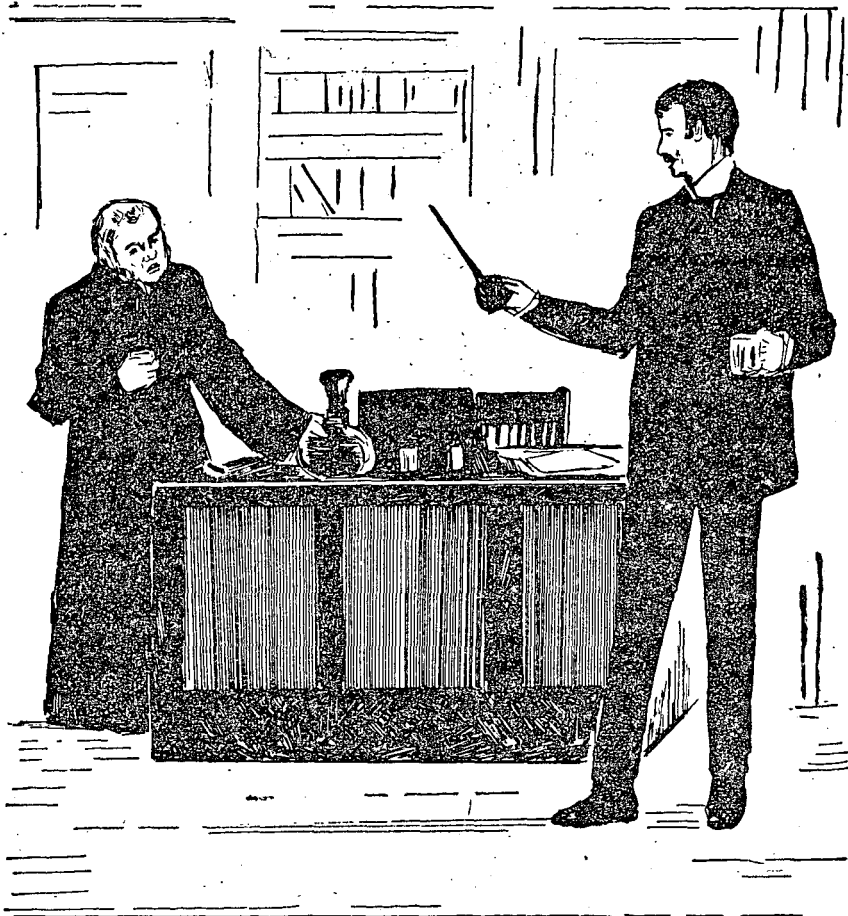
SAM MOSKOWITZ

REGARDED BY many as the greatest writer of dog stories who ever lived, the name of Albert Payson Terhune became a household word after his novel *Lad: A Dog* appeared in 1919. He loved dogs—particularly Collies—and bred them at his Pompton Lakes, N.J. home. Few men seemed to enjoy a finer insight into the psychology and motivation of dogs and his love for the animals created an immense following for his books—Bruce,

Buff: A Collie, Further Adventures of Lad, His Dog, Black Caesar's Clan, The Heart of a Dog and many others which followed in annual procession.

Because of the association of his name with dogs, few are aware that he had been a successful novelist and fiction writer for twenty-three years before his dog stories captivated the reading public and was a worldly man capable of writing excellent western, war, love or detective stories. So capable.

Originally published May, 1899 in
THE QUAKER MAGAZINE



was Terhune, that between 1906 and 1916, his income fluctuated between \$12,000 and \$30,000 a year, during an era when annual incomes for laborers for a six-day week were as low as \$600 a year and, incredibly, \$1,500 a year was definitely a good wage for the middle-class.

A novel of his titled "Dad" which ran in four installments in ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY, July 4th to 25th, 1914 was unusual inasmuch as two chapters in that novel of the human side of the Civil War were completely written by later Nobel Prize winner Sinclair Lewis, who also received

twenty-five percent of the check for his contribution.

Terhune may have come by his writing ability genetically, because his mother Mary Virginia Terhune was a novelist who achieved considerable fame under the name of Marion Harland. Terhune's first book was *Syria From the Saddle*, written after his return to America from traveling abroad and published in 1896. Another trip to the Holy Land with his mother resulted in their collaborating on a novel *Dr. Dale* in 1900, which received a considerable amount of notice because it was done by a mother and son collaboration.

Terhune had worked on newspapers including *THE NEW YORK WORLD*. It was his job as a crime reporter to cover many of the murders that occurred and also to follow the fascinating detective work as police cracked many a difficult case. It seemed to him, from his vantage point, that a newspaper man, with all information funneling into his media, would be in a good position to play the part of detective. That is what we have in *The Spindle Clue*, a fine mystery murder with the newsman as the detective.

It first appeared in Frank A. Munsey's scarcely remembered

magazine *THE QUAKER* for May, 1889. *THE QUAKER* was a companion to the all-fiction magazine *THE ARGOSY*, printed half on pulp paper and half on coated stock. It had started out as *THE PURITAN*, aimed at competition with the *LADIES HOME COMPANION* and *THE WOMAN'S HOME JOURNAL*.

But the publisher, Frank A. Munsey seemed to have a better instinct for what pleased men than what pleased women. *THE QUAKER*, when Terhune appeared in it, was a 192 page, pulp-sized magazine whose slogan was: "A magazine to entertain. It has no other mission." For 10 cents it featured "Good easy reading for the people—no frills, no fine finishes, no hair splitting niceties, but action, action, always action." This scarcely seemed in keeping with the title *THE QUAKER*. But as a harbinger of the kind of writer Terhune would someday be, the issue also featured a handsomely illustrated article titled: "Dogs: Their Way and Friendships."

The Spindle Clue was one of a number of detective stories that Terhune wrote during the early years of his writing career, and he displayed a sure feel for the elements that go into a "Whodunit."

by ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

THE PAPER had gone to press. It was 2:30 A.M., and all the staff except two "emergency men" and a copy reader and an office boy, had gone home.

One of the emergency reporters had stretched himself out on a long table, his head on a dictionary, and was sleeping as only a seasoned reporter could on so uncomfortable a bed.

Elkins, the other reporter, was shooting craps with the copy reader; and the office boy, after writing his own name with quaint flourishes seventy nine times on a sheet of copy paper, was nodding in his chair.

The lights burned drearily under their green shades, leaving much of the great city room in gloom. The roar of the city had died away, so that the clang of an occasional cable car or the rattle of a market truck on the Park Row pavements jarred noisily.

"Eight's, your point, Brewer," said Elins, as the copy reader again sent the dice rattling along the yellow table.

Brewer nodded. "Come eight!" he coaxed, after the absurd fashion of crap shooters. "Come an eight! *Come* a little eight!—Pshaw!"

He had thrown a seven, which gave both dice and shakes to Elkins.

The latter stopped to light another cigarette before picking up the dice.

"Hereward's dead to the world," Elkins commented, nodding his head toward the sleeping reporter on the adjacent table.

"He was out working on the Schenck murder case all last night and yesterday," said Brewer, "and he's worn out."

"That's just like the tender consideration of the chief," grumbled Elkins, blowing out the match and tossing it down on the paper strewn floor. "It's just like him to put a tired out man on emergency duty."

He picked up the dice and jerked them across the table. "Six is my point," he said, lowering his voice so as not to wake the sleeper. "Come a little easy six! *Come* a four and a two!"

A five and a two came instead and he rolled the dice across to Brewer.

"I'm sorry for Hereward," said the copy reader. "He isn't getting a fair show here."

"Neither is any one for that matter," growled Elkins.

It is an unwritten rule among newspaper men to grumble at those in authority, and to bemoan their own hard luck—a peculiarity which they share with three fourths of the world's working population.

"Hereward's a first rate reporter," went on Brewer, "but he's had bad luck on nearly every assignment since the new managing editor's been here. So he's in bad with the chief. If he gets thrown down on this Schenck murder case I'm afraid they'll send in his resignation."

The Schenck murder case had attracted a great deal of attention. Otto Schenck, a rich Wall Street broker, had lived with his aged parents on Madison Avenue. He had been found lying huddled in a heap, in the vestibule of his home, one morning ten days earlier. Outer and inner front door of the house were wide open, and valuable plate was missing from the diningroom.

The motive for the murder, said the police, was quite clear. A thief, or thieves, had entered and robbed the Schenck house, and on departing had met the young man coming in the front door. Otto had showed fight and was killed.

Thus far the case seemed simple enough. But there was another, more inexplicable element in it. The only mark of

violence on the victim was a tiny reddish spot over the heart. Around this spot were one or two minute flakes of dark brown dust.

The spot was too tiny to be caused by even a stiletto blow. Yet an autopsy proved the heart to have been pierced by a weapon of some sort, the point of which had entered at the right ventricle. Some wiseacre had showed that such a blow, delivered in such a fashion, must have been dealt with the left hand.

And there the police knowledge stopped short. They were scouring the city for a left handed thief. Pawnshops had been ransacked in vain for traces of the stolen silver. The Schenck servants, and Otto's father and mother, testified that they had slept peacefully through the whole tragedy.

Old Mrs. Schenck was prostrated by the blow. Her husband bore himself with stern fortitude, but he had aged ten years during the past fortnight.

And this was the helpless case to which Jack Hereward, of the *Morning Planet*, had been assigned. Like other reporters he had written columns of uninteresting detail and conjecture and had elaborated each police theory to three times the space it was worth.

He had done his best, but ill

luck dogged his steps; and, as Brewer said, if he didn't make a hit of some sort on the case, there was every chance of his being discharged.

"Three o'clock! Sure glad we can get out of this!" cried Elkins, dropping the dice into his drawer. "Wake up, Hereward, and go home."

"Eh! What?" muttered Hereward, sitting up. "Time to go home?" he went on, clambering down from the table. His head was heavy with sleep, and he staggered as he tried to stand. He threw out one arm to save himself from falling, and brought down his left hand heavily on the copy desk.

A cry of pain followed his action, echoed by exclamations of horror from Brewer and Elkins.

Hereward, in his effort to preserve his balance, had thrown his full weight on the hand that fell on the copy desk. The hand had come down with terrible force on a spindle that held half a dozen sheets of yellow "flimsy."

This spindle was like others of its sort used for the filing of papers. It consisted of an upright steel wire, sharpened to a fine point, and attached to a round wooden base.

The spindle had run clean through the reporter's hand.

"Come down to the drug

store," cried Brewer, "and get the wound disinfected, or you may get an infection."

But Hereward, having drawn out the spindle with a groan of pain, was staring open mouthed at his hand. He gazed at it with an eager intensity, that for a moment drove all memory of pain from his mind.

"What are you waiting for?" said Elkins, holding open the door for him.

Hereward glanced again at the tiny, almost bloodless spot on his palm, and at the little flakes of rust left by the spindle. He answered briefly:

"I'm not waiting for anything. Come on."

In the hallway that led to the drug store were one or two other newspaper men. Elkins and Brewer shouldered their way past them and gained the door of the shop.

"Where's Hereward?" asked Brewer as they paused.

He had vanished.

Slipping through the outer door, Hereward had gained the street. His hand throbbed and ached furiously, but the reporter wrapped a handkerchief about the wound and set his teeth to keep down the pain.

Two minutes later he was speeding up town as fast as a Third Avenue "L" train could carry him.

It was 3:30 A.M. when the

father of Otto Schenck, lying awake in his silent, death desolated house, heard a quick step at the front door, followed by the sharp *burr-r-r* of the electric bell.

Hastily donning a dressing gown, and putting on a pair of slippers, the old man groped his way down stairs and opened the front door.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Hereward—*Planet* reporter," was the response. "I have a clue that may be of interest and I came here before notifying the police. Sorry to disturb you at this time of night, but you've offered five thousand dollars reward for the murderer's arrest and I thought you ought to be the first to hear of any clue."

"I wasn't asleep," replied the old man. "Come into my study and tell me about it."

The tall, dressing gowned figure led the way into a back room, found the electric key and flooded the room with light.

"Now, then, Mr. Hereward—" he began. Then he broke off in surprise:

"Why, you're white as a sheet, man! and you're trembling. What's the matter?"

"I had an accident," answered the reporter briefly, pointing to his bandaged hand. The pain was intolerable, but he

choked it back and tried to speak calmly.

"A glass of whiskey will brace you up," said Mr. Schenck. "Wait a moment and I'll get you some."

The old man turned to a Japanned cupboard on the wall. Hereward's gaze swept the book lined walls, resting at last on the littered study table. There his eyes contracted and he remained looking fixedly among the pile of letters and papers that strewed the table. He had been in this room several times before, but never had anything in it interested him to such an extent.

Meantime Mr. Schenck had brought from the cupboard a huge decanter nearly full of whiskey and two glasses. Placing them on the table he sat down opposite Hereward.

The reporter raised his eyes from the table and looked keenly at the old man.

"You'll feel better for a drink," said Schenck. "Then you can tell me about this new clue of yours."

As he spoke Mr. Schenck lifted the heavy decanter easily, and turning it, filled both glasses.

"He's strong in the wrists for such an old man; but why doesn't he let me fill my own glass?" wondered Hereward, who was an adept in all points

of etiquette governing drinking bouts.

Then he noticed something peculiar in the host's method of handling the decanter. A second glance showed him that Schenck was manipulating it with his left hand.

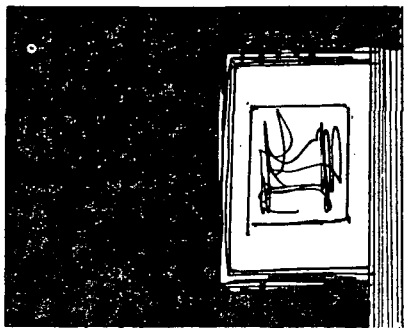
Hereward leaned forward as if to pick up his glass. He picked up, instead, a long spindle from the table. He turned this over once or twice, noticing its massive base of carved silver and the flecks of rust on the long wire.

"You killed him with this, didn't you, Mr. Schenck?" he asked gently, holding up the spindle.

The old man sprang to his feet and flashed a startled, indignant glance at the reporter.

Hereward returned his stare with utter indifference. In the silence that followed, the two could hear the distant roar of a Third Avenue "L" train, and the muffled snores of some one sleeping in the upper part of the house.

"That was the clue I had," said Hereward at last. "This is the sort of a wound a spindle makes," unwinding the bandage from his hand. "This spot is like the one over your son's heart. You see there's no use denying anything. We have all the proof we need," he ended, marveling at his own daring lie.



There was a crash as the decanter slipped from Schenck's stiff fingers and rolled gurgling about the floor.

The old man sank back in his chair, his stern fortitude all gone.

He buried his face in his trembling hands and shook from head to foot.

The gray old figure in the padded worn gown moved Hereward to a momentary pity. Then the reporter asked with mild curiosity,

"Why did you do it?"

"He was drunk," moaned the old man from behind his hands. "He was drunk—I heard him shambling up the street and climbing the steps—It wasn't the first time I'd lain awake for him. I let him in. He came in here and I followed him—He was drunk—and—and he said terrible things to me. He said we were living here on his charity, and he was sick of listening to my lectures on drink and sick of seeing his mother and me pottering round."

"He said he'd turn us out next day and leave us to starve. He often talked that way when he was drunk. But this time he seemed to mean it. And then—then he ordered me out of the room and threatened to beat me if I didn't go. *Me*—his own father. I am an old man, sir, and I'm not the man I used to be. I

suppose courage goes when strength goes."

He paused and a fresh shudder convulsed his crouching gray form. Throughout his broken, half-whispered speech Schenck had never removed his hands from his face.

Hereward said nothing, but eyed him intently.

"He staggered toward me," mumbled Schenck at last, taking up the thread of his story. "My son is—my son was—a strong man, sir, and very violent sometimes. I saw he meant to strike me and—and I was afraid. He was a violent man. Mr. Hereward."

"Well?" queried the reporter.

"And I picked up the first thing that came to hand to defend myself with. And the next thing I knew there he lay on the rug by the table all tumbled together. It was horrible!"

"So you pulled him into the vestibule and then hid the silver to make it appear that thieves killed him!" said Hereward with scarcely a note of inquiry in his voice.

"Yes—yes, sir. Though I can't see how you learned about it so soon. It is hard thing for an old man to be tried for his life and perhaps electrocuted. It is—it's a hard thing, sir. And after all," he pleaded,

"I hadn't meant to harm him. It was self defence, your honor—I mean Mr. Hereward."

The stately dignity with which Mr. Schenck had so favorably impressed all the reporters was gone. The shrivelled old man crouched on the floor at Hereward's feet.

"I—I fancied no one could find out, Mr. Hereward," Schenck muttered at last. "If I sign a confession do you think the law will deal more gently with me?"

The reporter did not reply, but the old man was evidently impressed by his own idea. Scrambling to his chair again he wrote a few shaky sentences on a blank sheet, signed the confession, and shoved it across to Hereward.

The sight of the written words awoke all the sleeping news gathering instinct in the reporter.

Every newspaper man knows how infinitely stronger is this instinct than any other earthly craving.

"Take it," entreated Schenck. "If I confess they may let me off easy."

Snatching the confession in one hand and the long, shining spindle in the other, Hereward made for the front door; never stopping for so much as a backward glance at the quivering gray figure, so pitifully old and

shrunk under the glare of the light.

The managing editor of the New York *Morning Planet* lived half a mile from the Schenck house. Five minutes later a panting, dishevelled reporter was gasping out to him a story that caused that half clad dignitary to gallop madly to the nearest telephone.

Dawn was breaking as a group of hastily summoned compositors and pressroom hands gathered together after their hour of hard work, to talk over the "Extra" that had just gone to press.

"This'll make the *Globe* and the rest of 'em look like thirty cents," said one. "It's the biggest beat that ever happened."

"That feller Hereward's really something," chuckled a second. "To think of his gettin' the whole story when every other reporter in town failed!"

"An' th' next edition's goin' to have a facsimile of the confession an' a photo of the spindle that did the murder," said a third. "Oh, it's the biggest beat that ever happened!"

"Yes, Hereward's terrific!" reiterated the second man. "He's gone back to old Schenck's again. I'll bet he'll get another good column or two out of it."

At that moment Hereward, without stopping to take off his

hat or coat, was entering the managing editor's office.

The chief was looking with delight over his hastily constructed "Extra," whose first page bore a four column scare head, reading:

**MURDERED HIS OWN SON.
AMOS SCHENCK CONFESSES
TO HAVING KILLED OTTO.
ALLEGES SELF DEFENCE.**

A Spindle His Weapon.

Mystery Cleared up by *Morning Planet* Reporter, and Confession Published Exclusively in the *Planet*.

As Hereward stepped into the sanctum the managing editor looked up with a smile.

"Anything new?" he asked. "Is he arrested yet?"

"He won't be arrested," said Hereward. "He hanged himself in his study just after I left the first time. He was quite dead before his body was found."

The managing editor leaped to his feet.

"Oh, I wrote that end of the story on the way down," said Hereward wearily, answering his chief's unasked question. "I've just turned it in to the city editor."

"Hereward!" cried the managing editor, grasping the young man's cold, unresponsive hand, "you've done some great work! You were clever to follow up that spindle clue and then to notice the old man was left handed. Do you know that it means a raise of pay for you?"

Through his wonder at the chief's actually volunteering a raise of pay to any one, there slowly crept into Jack Hereward's memory the picture of a gray, withered figure crouching at his feet.

"I'm very tired, sir," said the reporter, "and my hand hurts. I think I'd like a day off if you don't mind."

Next Month



Another DETECTIVES BY GASLIGHT Masterpiece:

THE LAST STORY

by SIR EDMUND C. COX

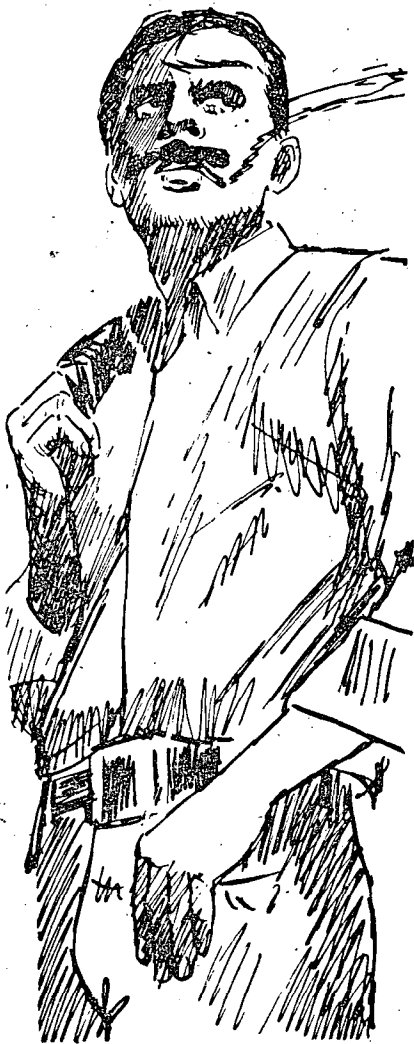
TRILBY'S WARDEN

Upstairs, he could hear the voice.
Was it a song of love—or of
sudden, very brutal death?

by
DENNIS O'NEIL

HE SITS alone in his tenement room, his cell, and waits for his prisoner to begin singing again. He is certain she will, certain she will forget the beatings, the rages, the sight of her lover's corpse lying half out of the bathtub, his blood befouling the porcelain, and then she will raise her lovely voice in song. He knows of these matters; he knows that some people are born to sing, and this girl is one of them. It is her nature.

He, too, is a prisoner; he is both the girl's warden and his own. There are millions like him, infesting the cities, unfettered, unguarded, garbed in civilian clothes, yet prisoners as surely as if they were chained in the Black Hole of Calcutta. They stoop; they tremble; and their skin is pale, always pale, untouched by light even when they are standing in brightest



sunshine. They inhabit invisible oubliettes, of their own making. You see them and you can't imagine a history, a childhood, a wife, aspirations, lusts, sorrows.

The girl's warden had all those things once: the wife, the child, and considerably more than a normal portion of lust and aspiration.

Some said he had greatness. Personally, he doubts it. A great man would never have made a series of stupid mistakes that led him to a courtroom and from there to a county jail where, one hideous night, he learned of a weakness in his nature he had not suspected and—

No matter exactly *what* he did. The act, which another might have forgotten, destroyed his pride, his will, his reasons. He knew that after he finished serving his six-month sentence, he would remain a prisoner. Forever. His weakness condemned him for eternity, plus 99 years.

He went to New York City, East Second Street, to a building built to house twenty people. It now shelters varying numbers, up to fifty, depending on the neighborhood supply of heroin and the availability of naive folk for mugging. He is never mugged, and wouldn't care if he were.

He does not drink, smoke, shoot up. These are not prison pasttimes. As do all the truly condemned, he sits, remembers, listens. About a year ago, he quite suddenly realized he was hearing a sound different from the auto horns and the clanking cans and the firecrackers and the shouts—"Eres un bastard"; "Shut the mouth, spick bitch"—and this new sound was—well, it was music. A clear contralto, slightly husky, the vocal equivalent of musk, coming from the apartment above. The words were muffled; he moved to the window and raised it, hoping to hear more clearly. She must have had her window open, too, because he could understand the words. He recognized them: a blues.

*When they all mistreat you,
no need
to think about me
'Cause I'm leavin' this coun-
try, blue as
I can be.*

Memories of women: those he had loved, those he had used, those who had loved him. Sweet memories.

*I think it's unfair to love and
not be loved,
I think it means beware when
you kiss and can not hug.*

He sat by the window the long summer afternoon, into the noisy evening and the not-silent night, remembering that he would never be either free or young, and glad of it. His young body had made many demands, and in heeding it he always lost some piece of beauty. Young, free, he would have been stirred by the song, his loins would have stirred, and thus deafened him to the simple loveliness of the voice, the music.

He stood, stretched, wondered briefly how many hours ago the singing had stopped, and sank content to his bare mattress.

It resumed the following day, at the same time, and continued through the ensuing days and weeks. Always the blues; always the husky, sad contralto. The concert—that was how he thought of it—became the event around which his existence centered, the single important thing in his routine. He would not cash his welfare check, nor go to the store, nor look in the mailbox, if there was any chance that in so doing he would miss a second of the concert. He resented the street noises as, in an earlier incarnation, he would have resented a loud drunk at an opera hall. And he feared winter; in cold weather, she would close her windows.

Meanwhile, though, the windows *weren't* closed and, despite the street, he could have his concert and his reveries.

Occasionally, he asked himself: What is she like? Old? Young? White? Black? Although the patter of her footfalls skipping down the stairs outside his door was soon achingly familiar to him, and he could have easily peeked out, he never saw her. It was better to have the music pure, untainted by other impressions. For instance, suppose she resembled a woman he had wronged, or who had wronged him? Intolerable, it would be. No, better to cherish the song and let the rest remain unknown.

Still, he came to know something of her personal life. She lived alone, arose late in the morning, ten-thirty. On weekdays she left the building at five—going to work?—and returned by cab after midnight. Weekends, she watched television and, he guessed, read. She was not, he was convinced, a junkie, alcoholic or whore—actually, not the sort of person one expected to live in a New York slum. Nor was she, like himself, a prisoner. She was... just visiting.

In the fall, her life changed. The harbingers of change were the heavy tread of male shoes

on the floor of her apartment, and the peel of masculine mirth in the hallway leading to her door, generally late at night. At first, these evidences of the newcomer were occasional; quickly, they became frequent, and then perpetual. The girl had taken a lover—no doubting it—and the lover was in residence. She sang:

*He put his arms around me
like a ring around
the good Lord's sun
Said he ain't had no woman
to love him, Lord,
Like I done.*

Very well, thought the listener, it was to be expected, and no cause for alarm. She was still singing at the appointed hour each afternoon, and the weather was yet warm enough for open windows. She was performing her duty to him, her audience; let her have fun.

But it wasn't fun, not for long. Either the lover was a vicious creep, or the singer provoked him mercilessly. The fights began as shouts, shrill, half-articulated threats. Initially, they occurred once a week. By early October, they were nightly, and more than screaming matches. Yells. Crashing crockery. Slaps. The sickening thud of a frail form falling hard to the floor. Often.

The listener listened, and writhed in helplessness.

The singing gave way to an older sound: weeping.

The listener found himself full of emotion; he was startled to discover in himself the forgotten, unprisoner-like feeling of hate. His prisoner's tranquility was ruined. He hated this lover, this anonymous brute, as his younger self had hated a few people he ultimately crushed. He wished—no, he *prayed*—for the power to crush the foul-fisted stealer of his music, his tranquility. But he was old, weak, ineffectual, fit only for listening, dreaming—and, he learned, for bearing witness.

It happened, his witness bearing, on Halloween. The fight between the singer and the brute had started earlier than usual, at noon, and, perhaps sustained by the pagan spirit of the holiday, raged on without ceasing to twilight, to darkness. It moved from the girl's quarters into the hall, and back. While the two were in the hall, the listener heard them perfectly, and shuddered at the ugliness.

"You aren't a man! You stink."

"I'm warning you—shut up."
Slap.

"Hitting me give you a thrill? I'm glad something does."

"Damn you, be quiet."

"Or you'll tell your mommy on me?"

Slap.

"That ends it, Tommy. I'm leaving."

"You do and you damn well best keep on going, 'cause I'll be on the phone to your old lady and—"

"Do anything you want. I'm leaving."

Sound of her running down the stairs. Quiet, for a moment. Then an outraged bellow, and a crash of smashing furniture, and silence.

Footfalls on the steps. A door creaking. Tommy's bellow:

"What's this supposed to be? Give me that—"

And a scream of agony, immediate, real, too intense to ignore.

Footfalls. Someone descending the stairs. The listener opened his door and glimpsed a figure vanishing into the shadows of the stairwell.

A scraping, as of a shoe being dragged slowly across linoleum, and a moan, and a low, wet cough. The listener looked up. He—Tommy?—stood swaying, left hand clutching the balustrade, right gripping an object that gleamed in the light from the bare bulb over his head, a narrow object jutting from his chest.



He stumbled away and entered the apartment.

The police later said he died in the bathtub.

"...was stabbed with an ordinary kitchen knife, the kind you buy for a buck-and-a-half at the hardware store," the detective was saying. The detective was large, crew-cut, neatly dressed in expensive looking brown tweed. He fidgeted, squirming on the chair; it was obvious he wanted, acutely, to be somewhere else. "Now can you tell me what you told the patrolman, sir? You saw the killer?"

"I did, yes," replied the listener.

The detective leaned forward, and with attentiveness too elaborate to be real, asked, "Can you describe him?"

"Well, he ran by the door

there just as I was opening it, fast, and I, well—”

The detective smiled a pre-fabricated smile. “Take it easy. No rush. He ran past, you say?”

“I’m sure he was tall, and dark. A Puerto Rican, maybe.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised. You notice his clothing?”

“A jacket—a blue jacket, I’m sure. And slacks, those with the big cuffs, like sailors wear.”

“Bell bottoms?”

“Yes, bell bottoms. Oh, and gummies.”

“Gummies?”

“What you call tennis shoes.”

“Anything else?”

“I didn’t get a good look. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” The detective rose and again smiled, a genuine smile, this, a smile of relief. “You’ve been very helpful. We’ll try not to bother you further, but we may need you to testify if we catch him. You’ll be available?”

“I don’t go anywhere.”

As the detective was stepping into the hall, the listener asked, “Officer, do you think you will catch him?”

“Frankly, I doubt it. I read this as a junkie crime, a burglary that went sour. The victim fought, the kid panicked and

killed him. A routine homicide. We get ’em a dozen a week, and there’s no way to solve ’em unless we get lucky. Once in a blue moon, we do. But we don’t count on it.”

The detective was gone, forever; the murderer would not be caught. A routine homicide. No way to solve ’em.

The girl eventually returned, and resumed her familiar rituals, arising late, leaving at five, arriving by cab at midnight. He can hear her, padding from bed to bath to kitchen.

She must, by now, realize she is a prisoner, for she has surely read the note he slipped under her door:

I saw you running away from killing Tommy. Don’t ever leave.

So, yes, she is undoubtedly forgetting the rages, the beatings, the feel of the knife handle in her fist, as he is forgetting the hideous expression that twisted her beauty as she disappeared into the shadows the night Tommy died, the flash of her lean calves as she plunged down the stairs.

But she will never forget she is a prisoner. She won’t; he *knows*.

And in the summer afternoons, she will sing.

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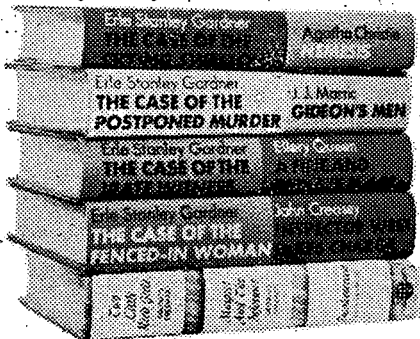
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